

Asan Roundtable on North Korea's High-level Visit to the 2014 Incheon Asian Games



Date: October 6, 2014

Venue: Conference Room (3F), The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

Speakers: [Dr. Hahm Chaibong](#) (President), [Amb. Chun Yungwoo](#) (Senior Advisor), and [Dr. Choi Kang](#) (Vice President)

Introduction

On Monday, October 6, 2014, the Asan Institute for Policy Studies held a special roundtable to discuss the surprise visit by an 11-member North Korean delegation to attend the closing ceremony of the 2014 Incheon Asian Games. Led by Hwang Pyong So, Vice Chairman of the National Defense Commission, the delegation included some of the highest-ranking individuals in North Korea, including Choe Ryong Hae, a secretary of the Korean Workers' Party, and Kim Yang Gon, a top Communist Party official.

The surprise visit sparked intense media speculation regarding its significance and consequences for inter-Korean relations, with some commentators calling it an opportunity to resume high-level talks and improve ties. This roundtable assessed the North Korean delegation's visit by drawing on the extensive first-hand experience of the Asan Institute's senior leadership in dealing with North Korea. The discussion was moderated by Mr. Ahn Sung Kyoo, Chief Editor at the Asan Institute.

Roundtable Discussion

Q: Three senior North Korean officials paid a surprise visit to Incheon to attend the closing ceremony of the Asian Games. What should we make of this? Despite receiving widespread coverage by the South Korean media, there is a need to examine the issue in greater detail and depth.

CHUN: There is a tendency to attach too much significance to the visit. To be precise, they were here to attend an international sporting event that happened to be taking place in Incheon. Their primary purpose was not to hold a bilateral meeting with South Korea. This is akin to conflating the North Korean Foreign Minister's appearance at the UN General Assembly with an official visit to the United States.

From North Korea's point of view, the successful performance of its athletes at an international sporting event was cause for celebration. The primary objective of this visit was for domestic political purposes: to show off Kim Jong-un's achievements and to boost the morale of its athletes and citizens. But no doubt, they also hoped to stir up controversy within South Korea over current government policy towards North Korea.

CHOI: I agree with Ambassador Chun. First of all, since Kim Jong-un took over, the regime has emphasized sports, and its achievements at the Asian Games were important to showcase. Secondly, North Korea has attempted to break out of its diplomatic isolation by sending Secretary Kang Sok-ju of the Workers' Party of Korea to Europe and Foreign Minister Ri Su-yong to the US, so far to no avail. This is why they are now reaching out to South Korea. Given its tense relationship with China and the lack of progress with Japan on the abductee issue, North Korea had no choice but to reach out to South Korea. If North Korea has so far tried the policy of "speak to the US, bypass South Korea," now the strategy can be termed "speak to South Korea, bypass neighboring countries." This also may be a preventative measure, given the possibility that the US might implement an even tougher policy towards the North after the midterm elections in November. It is also possible that the North is trying to undermine trilateral cooperation among the US, South Korea, and Japan.



HAHM: I agree with this line of thinking. The current North Korean diplomatic offensive is unprecedented. There have never been so many North Korean diplomats visiting other countries simultaneously. They have set up more than 20 economic development zones and have tried to defend its human rights record at the UN General Assembly, when other countries used the same stage to criticize North Korea for its human rights violations. But such efforts have yielded no results. Sending

three high-level officials to the Asian Games was a clever ploy that raised South Korea's expectations for a breakthrough in inter-Korean relations without having to provide any concrete message or measure.

CHUN: There is a lack of understanding on our part on just how important sports is as a political tool for the North Korean regime. Dictatorships tend to use sports as a distraction from domestic issues and to shore up support for the regime.

HAHM & CHOI: As did the former Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc.

CHUN: Given the successful performance of its athletes at the Asian Games and how the regime operates, it was worthwhile for the North to send high-level officials to take advantage of the occasion. Choe Ryong-hae currently serves as Chairman of the State Physical Culture and Sports Guidance Commission, a title that was previously held by Jang Song-thaek. While this post is not considered to be particularly powerful, it still plays an important role within the regime. Compared to South Korea's Korean Olympic Committee (KOC), it is a far more influential organization.

Speculations on whether Choe was purged have been widespread in South Korea.



However, it is difficult to find someone this influential in North Korea. No matter the political title, he is a major stakeholder of the North Korean regime. On the contrary, figures like Vice Marshal Hwang Pyong-so, director of the Korean People's Army General Political Department, are the hired guns. Choe is the son of Choe Hun, one of the founding members of North Korea. His name alone makes him an incredibly powerful figure.

HAHM: News of the visit has been widely reported in the North Korean media. However, we have not heard much about it after the delegation's return. South Korea is looking at this visit strictly within the framework of inter-Korean relations, while the North is simply regarding this as a celebration of its achievements at the Asian Games. Inter-Korean relations were not the primary purpose of this visit.

CHUN: I wouldn't say that inter-Korean relations did not factor in at all in the decision to send these officials, but 80 to 90 percent of the focus was on the sporting event.

HAHM: That is why there was no official letter of any kind, and the delegation declined the offer to meet with President Park Geun-hye.

Q: Inter-Korean relations are in a state of paralysis. Given this situation, is it possible that the North is sending a message that it wants to talk by sending the delegation?

CHUN: I am sure North Korea will be ready to begin talks if and when the conditions are right. Yet, it is difficult to interpret this visit as a sign that the North wants to talk. It is possible that the North Korean delegation did not want to be seen as petty by rejecting South Korea's request for high-level talks. It is also possible that the North is under the impression that it did South Korea a great favor by agreeing to hold talks.

CHOI: Hwang Pyong-so's statements implied something similar. His statements such as North Korea looks to "move [inter-Korean relations] from a small trail closer to a bigger road" and his offer to hold the high-level meeting at South Korea's convenience, either in October or November, project a magnanimous image of North Korea that dispenses big favors.

CHUN: Holding talks is not very important to North Korea. What it really cares about is to get something in return for agreeing to hold talks. We had a high-level meeting in February of this year and have had plenty more under President Lee Myung-bak. Talking with the South does not bother North Korea. Actually, it is because South Korea values high-level talks so much that North Korea has begun to attach meaning to it.

Q: The Blue House is being criticized for inviting the North Korea delegation to meet with President Park, which the delegation declined. What is your opinion?

HAHM: According to initial news reports on the visit, President Park had stated she had no plans to meet with the North Korea delegation. That was the correct call by



the Blue House, and that should have been its stance throughout. It is unfortunate that the Blue House changed its mind the following day. If the North Korean delegation had an official letter from Kim Jong-un or had requested a meeting with President Park, then it would have been a different story. The delegation clearly stated that they had planned to arrive early in the morning and leave in the evening. They expressed no further interest, explicit or otherwise, in meeting with the president, and yet the Blue House

approached the delegation first. This was inappropriate. Why did the government make the first move only to be met with a "no"? It shows that the government is still

trapped in the thinking that anytime a North Korea delegation makes its way to South Korea, it is because North Korea wants to improve inter-Korean relations.

CHUN: That was an embarrassment. Usually when government officials visit another country on such short notice, leaders rarely take the time to meet these officials. If the delegation apologized for the short notice, requested a meeting with the President, and was granted that request upon consideration by the Blue House, then this wouldn't be as controversial. It is difficult to understand why the Blue House made the inquiry when the delegation had not even mentioned the possibility of a meeting.

If the press release is true, the government failed to uphold the dignity of our country. Even if it was true that the president of South Korea considered meeting with North Korean representatives when they had not even requested it, the government should have kept it confidential. The government official who disclosed this incident should be held responsible. This should have been kept under wraps, unless North Korea disclosed it first. If the South Korean government made this public without realizing the critical nature of the issue, it is certainly a serious problem. If we continue down this path, the foundation of the government's policy towards North Korea can be undermined.

CHOI: From this visit, North Koreans have in essence learned that South Korea is desperate for inter-Korean dialogues. The government should have stayed aloof and kept the North Koreans on their toes, telling them to enjoy the food and the games. Instead, government officials and representatives of major political parties hurriedly went all the way out to Incheon to meet and greet the delegation. Such a reaction contrasts with the past visit by Kim Ki-nam and Kim Young-nam, who had to extend their stay to have a meeting with President Lee Myung-bak. It was a big mistake, and North Korea holds the initiative now. The South Korean government is now caught in a trap. Some consider the current situation as an opportunity to resolve misunderstandings between the two Koreas and resume inter-Korean dialogues, but we need to be more prudent in situations like this.

Q: Does it mean the Park government lost much due to its impatience?

CHUN: The South Korean government failed to maintain a proper posture because it was too excited and impatient. North Korea can misread the situation now. We sent the impression that we are desperate and impatient for an inter-Korean dialogue. We made North Koreans think that, with time, the South Korean public and media will support rescinding the May 24 Sanctions against North Korea. Such misperceptions may lead to North Korea making unreasonable demands, which will further hinder inter-Korean dialogues.

Q: The South Korean society is deeply polarized over North Korean issues. Would not the conciliatory gestures coming from the conservative administration help alleviate this problem?

CHOI: We have yet to hear on this issue from the entire spectrum of conservative opinions. The voice of a few could be perceived to be the voice of many, creating misperception among the public. Of course, the government's efforts to talk with North Korea could have significant effects, but the current situation is not consistent with the government's main North Korea policy objectives: denuclearization, economic reform and open door.

HAHM: It is dangerous to think the visit by high-level North Korean officials will help resolve political polarization in South Korea. It is tantamount to saying that we should use inter-Korean relations for domestic political purposes. We need to remind ourselves of the seriousness of problems that North Korea presents to us. They are developing nuclear weapons. Looking to North Korea as a solution to domestic political issues is a dangerous idea. We should objectively assess the North Korea issue as a matter of national security and do everything to de-link it from domestic politics.

CHUN: We are confusing the means with the objectives of North Korea policy, and the mood with the actual status of inter-Korean relations. This is more troubling than political polarization. Holding inter-Korean summits and high-level talks should not be an end in itself. It is one of many means the government can employ in order to achieve the objectives of our North Korea policy. We could hold the inter-Korean summit and provide economic assistance to North



Korea if these measures help achieve our policy objectives. It is wrong to disregard our objectives and seek to have bilateral talks, hold inter-Korea summits, and lift the May 24 Sanctions if they undermine our goals.

We need to understand the objective of lifting the May 24 Sanctions and the consequences of such a decision. Are we going to actively provide economic

assistance for North Korea when it is pursuing both nuclear weapons and economic development? Are we going to hold inter-Korean dialogues even if it strengthens North Korea's repressive system? Demanding inter-Korean dialogues without clear policy objectives for dialogues' sake can be harmful to our nation's interest. If North Korea strikes us on the right cheek, should we turn the other cheek? Should we forgive North Koreans no matter what they do? Our gestures of forgiveness might make us look magnanimous, but they might undermine our national security. Such an approach can further endanger South Korea and destabilize the peace and stability on the Korean peninsula, but people do not understand it.

Q: But the lifting of the May 24 Sanctions is discussed by the conservatives and liberals alike.

CHUN: That is simply populism.

CHOI: The May 24 Sanctions were imposed due to North Korea's attack on the corvette *Cheonan*. If North Korea does not satisfy the conditions stated in the May 24 Sanctions, they should remain in place. If we lift the sanctions in order to have dialogue, our North Korea policy won't be sustainable and will end up shifting, depending on the prevailing political mood. This makes our North Korea policy vulnerable to changes that could inadvertently support North Korea's goals to pursue both nuclear weapons and economic development. In this case, the ROK government's North Korea policy would actually hamper the efforts for North Korea's denuclearization.

HAHM: According to the press, the South Korean government confirmed that it will not lift the May 24 Sanctions. It is the right decision. There are no fundamental changes to the status quo, and thus a change in our North Korea policy is unnecessary as of yet. Many feel a fundamental change has occurred as a result of the visit, but, in fact, nothing has changed.

Q: The next high-level talks between the two Koreas will be crucial. What are your thoughts and prospects on high-level talks scheduled for late October or early November?

HAHM: If the recent visit by the North Korean delegation was a sincere gesture seeking a breakthrough in inter-Korean relations, it will become evident in the next high-level talks. If North Korea is willing to address issues such as the sinking of the *Cheonan*, the death of Park Wang-ja, the South Korea tourist shot dead during a visit to Mount Geumgang, or freezing its nuclear weapons program, we will know they are sincere. If North Korea disputes over procedural trivialities as in the past,

without focusing on measures to improve the bilateral relationship, it will simply reconfirm nothing has changed. There is no hurry. South Korea has already declared its plan of action when North Korea meets certain conditions. When these conditions are satisfied, we are even willing to provide large-scale economic assistance to North Korea; Pyongyang only needs to show the correct attitude. In short, it is unnecessary to disclose our intentions beforehand or beg for dialogue.

CHOI: The second round of high-level talks will attract a lot of hype, but I have doubts on the outcome of the meeting. We will be lucky if we can set the agenda for the next steps, and it is likely that the outcome will be an agreement to hold more meetings. North Korea will continue the dialogue with South Korea, since it remains the only country willing to hold meetings with Pyongyang.

CHUN: The problem is we have raised the expectations and attached too much value to high-level talks. It is also problematic that we gave North Koreans the initiative to set the agenda for future talks. The fact that we were considering lifting the May 24 Sanctions unilaterally was akin to giving North Koreans the upper hand when it comes to negotiations.

Q: During today's regular briefing, the Ministry of Unification said the May 24 Sanctions would not be lifted until North Korea made clear gestures of apology.

CHUN: One should not just focus on today's briefing. Looking beyond and taking into consideration other announcements from the Ministry of Unification, such statements seem to allude that the South Korean government would discuss lifting the May 24 Sanctions in exchange for holding high level talks. To be honest, these announcements come across as if the Ministry of Unification is begging for high-level talks. What is more urgent than lifting May 24 Sanctions for the North Korean regime are leaflet-dropping operations and psychological warfare against the supreme leader. In North Korea's value system, preventing attacks that can erode North Korea's ideological foundations is more urgent than earning 500 million dollars a year. Lifting the May 24 Sanctions is a secondary objective. What North Korea wants is their theocracy to remain in place and South Korea to continue supporting the regime financially in their policy of simultaneously pursuing nuclear and economic development, without having to give up the former. In these circumstances, what do we want?—reunions of separated families and inter-Korean economic cooperation that does not support the development of North Korea's nuclear capabilities. The talks should continue, but it is too early to be optimistic.

CHOI: North Korea always brings serious and difficult agendas to the talks, whereas we tend to bring easier and lighter ones. Family reunions are important, but within the broader scope of inter-Korean relations, military-security issues are far more

important. However, we tend to put less weight on the latter. If we keep managing inter-Korean dialogues like this, the issue of denuclearization will get lost. The Roh Administration was under the illusion that as long as the inter-Korean dialogue is on track, one could keep the nuclear issues under control. There is high chance that we will get trapped in the same illusion if we proceed in this way.

Q: The Ministry of Unification released a statement that they will put great importance on family reunion issues in future high-level talks. Despite this, is there a possibility that the talks can be extended to deal with more fundamental issues?

CHUN: While we attach the utmost importance to the nuclear issue, North Korea argues that it is a bilateral issue between the US and itself, since North Korea claims it has armed itself with nuclear weapons because of the US's hostile policy towards it. We won't be able to put the topic of denuclearization on the table at the high-level talks. But without it, what else can we do? All that is left are humanitarian issues and facilitating cultural exchange. Even though these are important topics, they do not get to the heart of the inter-Korean relations.

Q: To engage North Korea into conversation, we could deal with soft issues and then bring out the topic of nuclear issues.

CHUN: It is possible. But can we satisfy North Korea with 'soft' issues? To reach an agreement on a family reunion for several hundred people, are we going to lift the May 24 Sanctions and provide North Korea with 500 million dollars in financial assistance? While North Korea still does not admit and apologize for the sinking of the *Cheonan*? If North Korea does not give up its nuclear program, it is more likely that the international community will strengthen its sanctions against North Korea. We need to consider whether we are going to be the one breaking away and undermining international sanctions regime against North Korea. What we want is denuclearization. But North Korea refuses to deal with us on that important issue, and simply wants us to provide it with economic assistance for its dual track policy of economy and nuclear weapons development.

HAHM: Many think that we can naturally move on to nuclear issues from soft ones, but the US is the link that can make this transition possible. Therefore, we need to understand what the US and the neighboring countries' positions are on this. To me, the US policy toward North Korea hasn't changed. It has clearly stated that it won't hold talks with North Korea that excludes nuclear issues, and it won't hold talks for talks' sake either. Preoccupied with its own problems, such as the ongoing crisis in the Middle East, the US probably did not view North Korean high officials visiting

South Korea as a diplomatic breakthrough or attach too much significance to it. While we take the nuclear issue very seriously, as long as North Korea maintains its stance that the nuclear issue is a matter solely between North Korea and the US, there exists an inherent limitation to inter-Korean dialogues as currently structured. Some seem to harbor groundless and irresponsible expectations that the US will be pressured or persuaded to change its stance towards North Korea by a simple change in mood precipitated by an inter-Korean dialogue.

Q: During a senior staff meeting held on October 6, President Park said, “Efforts should be made so that an inter-Korean dialogue is not a one-shot event, but regularized,” and that “North Korea should show a genuine change in its attitude.” Because of our demands and limitations of the agenda, the prospect of high-level talks does not seem good.

CHOI: I think there will be one or two high-level talks, but no progress will be made. We need to show that we are willing to leave the talks anytime, if there is no concrete result. This is the only way that can ensure we see progress. We can’t accomplish our goals if we focus too much on the mere act of holding talks.

CHUN: We shouldn’t expect too much from high-level talks. We should definitely continue the talks, but we don’t have to grant North Korea what it wants. Talks can be held regularly or irregularly as needed. By doing so, we will be able to figure out what is possible with North Korea and understand its true intentions. But we shouldn’t become overly optimistic and expect a big breakthrough in inter-Korean relations.

Q: Leftists claim that rather than continuing the stand-off with North Korea without a dialogue, which does not help resolve nuclear issues, it would be better to talk to North Korea so that it can change eventually. If we utilize the high-level talks well, would it not provide us with such an opportunity?

CHUN: The best way is to induce North Korea to change without giving it money. If this is possible, we should definitely do it. However, in reality our efforts to sustain inter-Korean dialogues and foster friendly relations have led North Korea to keep its nuclear capabilities and supported them financially, which decreases the pressure of denuclearization. We need to avoid this. People-to-people exchanges are also fine, because doing so does not involve handing over money that would help prop up the regime. If we invest funds that are comparable to the amount invested in the Kaesong Industrial Complex and expand social exchanges to millions of people per year, it will effect change in North Korea.

North Korea needs money to maintain and expand nuclear missile capabilities. It participates in inter-Korean dialogues in the hopes of receiving financial assistance for its economic development without giving up its nuclear weapons. If we are only helping North Korea boost its ability to harm the peace of the Korean Peninsula, it might be better to not hold the talks at all.

CHOI: If the Park Administration sticks to what they have been saying, there shouldn't be any problem. If the North promises to denuclearize and not provoke us militarily, we should restart the exchange.

HAHM: The logic of resuming talks with North Korea unconditionally is the same as saying "we should allow North Korea to continue its nuclear development." I am shocked to see how short people's memories are, as if our society is suffering from collective amnesia. The past 20 years of inter-Korean relations clearly show that no matter how much inter-Korean exchange takes place and how many dialogues we hold, North Korea has continuously developed nuclear weapons. This is a fact, plain and simple. Looking back, the period when we held the most talks was when North Korea undertook the bulk of its nuclear development. But people who insist on resuming the talks argue that North Korea is developing nuclear weapons because we halted the talks and imposed harsh sanctions against them. I don't understand how people can come up with such logic.

CHUN: The nuclear issue will not get resolved right now. So some say that rather than getting so caught up in it and halting inter-Korean dialogues, we can feel better and suffer less anxiety by shaking hands, smiling, and maintaining an amicable relationship with North Korea. There are people who insist that it is better to live in temporary peace, in exchange for some money. However, a responsible government cannot think that way. Ordinary citizens who do not always consider foreign affairs and security issues may think that. But if the government does the same, then it is a big problem.

When President Kim Dae-jung returned from Pyongyang, he declared that, "The danger of war on the Korean peninsula has disappeared." But, what did North Korea go on to do? They used the "good inter-Korean relations" as a way to obtain funds to develop nuclear and missile capabilities. Our present security situation has only gotten more serious. We have borrowed from the future of a more lasting peace to live in a bubble of peace in the present. Looking back, the foundations for peace have been eroded, while North Korea's ability to hold us hostage to its nuclear weapons has only grown. Instead of trying to prevent North Korea's nuclear weapons program, we subsidized it. Do we really want to return to such a policy?

While those calling for improved inter-Korean relations aren't necessarily suggesting a return to that policy, such an approach, taken to its logical conclusion, will nonetheless be the same. It is questionable whether people have seriously considered

what effect such an outcome would have for our security. The thinking behind such views seems to be that, “Rather than endure endless threats from a North Korea that clearly has no intention of relinquishing its nuclear weapons, it would be better to accept the inevitable and at least feel less stressed about it.” But the North Korea policy is not about charity.

HAHM: North Korea’s relations with all of its neighbors, including China, are at an all-time low. Its sources of financial aid have been cut off. So what would happen if we were to lift the May 24 Sanctions now? It has been reported that North Korea is in the final stages of preparing for a fourth nuclear test. Given that they are probably short of funds, lifting economic sanctions would be tantamount to giving them the money to carry out their nuclear test.

Q: Reports claim that Hwang Pyong-so, Director of the General Political Bureau, signaled his receptiveness to a possible summit. But, given the current situation, it seems rather meaningless to hold it.

CHUN: It is simplistic thinking to ask whether holding a summit is either good or bad in and of itself. What we should be cautious about is holding one without clearly-defined goals. North Korea stands to lose nothing from a summit. Summits are easy. The problem is holding one that isn’t worth holding. We can hold a summit with North Koreans anytime if we pay them enough. All you need is to satisfy one fifth of their demands, and we can have summits whenever we want.

What is hard is holding a summit that actually helps us and advances our North Korea policy. The Lee Myung-bak administration recognized that it would be difficult to hold a meaningful summit, and so chose not to hold a summit simply for the sake of it. It would have been worse to hold the kind of summit North Korea wanted than to hold none at all, given that it would simply help North Koreans acquire weapons with which to attack us. We knew they would use it to develop their nuclear and missile capabilities and withstand international pressure, so we declined their request.

CHOI: The South Korean media and society are too quick to show all of our hands. Signaling our desire for a summit is the same as giving North Korea the leverage in inter-Korean relations. Not obsessing with a summit raises the likelihood of it taking place. Obsessing over it does not guarantee its success and merely increases North Korea’s demands. In a situation like this, we should show that our willingness to hold a summit is contingent upon North Korea’s attitude. But when people talk about the need to hold an inter-Korean summit before the end of the third year of President Park’s term, it gives North Korea all the leverage.

CHUN: When we talk about the need to hold a summit by next year, lest there not be enough time, we look like we are in haste. Some have gone so far as to say that, since it will be too late once the president is three and a half years into her term, there needs to be a summit by next year. These people are tying our own hands and restricting our options. It isn't the government, but the opposition and the press that are doing this. This is creating a situation where people are led to believe that a summit in and of itself is the goal.

HAHM: This is due to domestic political calculations. What does the North Korean nuclear threat have to do with the domestic political cycle? One thing we should be paying attention to is China's reaction. China's reaction to the latest North Korean visit has been the most positive to date. While China would prefer that we take the lead, it will be important to see how China responds if we do not. I am curious to see what China will do if high-level talks fail to produce progress, break down, or if we decide not to lift the May 24 Sanctions. Will China maintain its current position, or will it decide that we had rebuffed Kim Jong-un's sincere attempt to reach out to us and, thus, proceed to shift its policy towards North Korea by inviting him to visit China, for example.

CHUN: What China basically wants is for the two Koreas to talk, because it does not want to see disturbances on its periphery. That is the essence of China's policy towards the Korean peninsula. It would prefer the two sides to continue to meet and keep the voices low. But if the two parties do not talk, it is also unlikely to criticize them for not doing so.

CHOI: The key to resolving the North Korean problem does not lie in China; it is with the US. While China's role is important, the US's is crucial. For the US, it may look as though, at the very moment that North Korea is finally beginning to buckle, South Korea is suddenly giving it breathing room. Without allaying such concerns, our North Korea policy cannot succeed. Unless we clearly communicate with the US our views on nuclear nonproliferation and military provocations, they may not agree with our decision to move towards dialogue with the North. The US has highly regarded Park administration's North Korea policy for its consistency, so it would pose difficulties for ROK-US relations if that policy were to fall apart now.

CHUN: We should not abandon our principled policy towards North Korea.

HAHM: As far as I can tell, nobody in the US who deals with North Korea has changed their opinion. The Republican Party is tipped to fare well in next month's mid-term elections. So if the Republicans take the House and the Senate, they will likely adopt an even tougher policy toward North Korea. We need to consider what impact such events will have on ROK-US relations. There should not be any discord between South Korea and the US on how to achieve North Korea's denuclearization. Since Kim Jong-un assumed power, an international consensus has emerged on the

need to denuclearize North Korea, while its human rights violations are also being discussed. For South Korea to make concessions when there has not been any visible change in North Korea would be poorly received in the US.

CHUN: Based on my understanding, the US is considering a new set of sanctions on North Korea. Congress has suggested measures similar to those of the ‘Iran Sanctions Act.’ There has been limited progress so far, but if North Korea conducts a nuclear or long-range missile test, and China uses its veto on the Security Council to block a resolution, the US is likely to unilaterally adopt new North Korea sanctions. This could put us on a collision course with the US.

We should avoid putting ourselves in a situation where we not only give up the goal of North Korea’s denuclearization, but also obstruct the international community’s denuclearization efforts. Moreover, we should not get in the way of the latest attempt by the international community, including the US and China, to implement tough, comprehensive sanctions against North Korea. If we abandoned the international sanctions regime and changed our policy from that of ‘zero tolerance’ to that of ‘nuclear acceptance’, it will be the same as going against the international community’s zero tolerance policy.

Updated: 15:44 (KST) October 09, 2014