

Telephone Diplomacy after the South Korean Presidential Election

On May 10, President Moon Jae-in exchanged telephone conversation with US President Donald Trump. President Trump congratulated President Moon on his victory and labeled the ROK-US alliance as a “great alliance.”¹ President Trump also invited President Moon to the United States for a summit meeting, which is now scheduled to take place in June in Washington, DC.²

President Moon also had a short conversation with the Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo on May 11. President Moon told PM Abe that the majority of the Korean public does not accept the December comfort women agreement. He stated that the two countries must address the history issue but must make every effort to not let history hinder cooperation between South Korea and Japan.³ The two leaders promised to meet in the near future.

President Moon also received a phone call from Chinese President Xi Jinping on May 11. This was the first time that a Chinese leader called a newly elected Korean president. President Moon assured President Xi that he was aware of Chinese interests and concerns regarding the deployment of THAAD.⁴ The two leaders are scheduled to meet in early July during the G20 meeting in Germany. President Moon is also expected to visit China in August to commemorate 25 years of normalized relations between South Korea and China.⁵

North Korea's Missile Test

On May 14, just 4 days after the inauguration of President Moon, North Korea test-fired another missile, which flew 780 kilometers (30 minutes) before falling into the East Sea.⁶ According to the Ministry of Defense, the missile was an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM). This was the first time that a North Korean missile reached an altitude

of over 2,000 kilometers.⁷ The previous record was 1413 kilometers, set by the Musudan test in June 2016.⁸ There are concerns that the North also tested its re-entry technology, which allows the warhead's stable re-entry into the atmosphere.⁹ If true, this would suggest a major advancement in the North's ICBM technology.

President Moon convened the National Security Council (NSC) and strongly condemned North Korea for the missile test and for threatening regional and world peace and security. He also ordered the NSC to hasten the development Korea Air Missile Defense (KAMD), Korea's indigenous missile defense system.¹⁰

Kim Kwan-jin, interim Blue House National Security Advisor (NSA), spoke on the phone with the US NSA, H.R. McMaster. The two strongly denounced the recent test and vowed to prepare for any type of provocation from the North.¹¹ Defense Minister Han Min-goo stated that the South is fully ready to launch a pre-emptive attack should the North show any sign of launching a missile attack.¹²

Reform Initiatives

President Moon has expressed a strong desire to reform the prosecutor's office. The reform blueprint includes creating a high level corruption investigation committee, with independent authority. The administration is also proposing to reduce the number of top posts by half and filling them with outside experts.¹³

The head of prosecutor's office submitted his resignation when it became apparent that Cho Kuk was appointed as the Senior Civil Affairs Secretary.¹⁴ The head of the Seoul District Prosecution and the Head of Criminal Affairs in the Justice Department also submitted their resignation when a newly created Anti-Corruption Secretary was appointed to investigate a new set of bribery charges.¹⁵

The investigation will continue, however. Cho stated that “the reform should end before the (regional) election scheduled for June next year.”¹⁶

Chaebol reform appears to be led by the Fair Trade Commission. Kim Sang-jo was appointed as its head. Kim said during the press conference on May 18 that “the focus should be on the four biggest firms in South Korea... [in order] to reduce over-concentration...”¹⁷ He added that the aggregate concentration department will be promoted as a bureau to enhance oversight and analyze unfair trade

by large corporations.¹⁸

Key Appointments

The newly elected president Moon Jae-in has announced key appointments for foreign policy. The appointment of the Minister of Foreign Affairs is gaining quite a bit of attention given that Kang Kyung-wha would be the first female for this top-level position if she is confirmed. The make-up also suggests that the new administration will place greater emphasis on a more dovish stance on foreign policy and national security.

Position	Name	Current Occupation	Year of Birth	Hometown	Education
Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister	Kim Dong-yeon	President of Ajou University	1957	Eumsung County, Chungbuk	Ph.D. (University of Michigan)
Minister of Foreign Affairs	Kang Kyung-wha	Special policy advisor to the UN Secretary-General	1955	Seoul	Ph.D. (University of Massachusetts)
Vice Chair of National Economic Advisory Council	Kim Kwang Doo	Chair-Professor at Sogang University	1947	Naju, Jeonnam	Ph.D. (University of Hawaii)
National Security Advisor to the President	Chung Eui-yong	Head of the International Conference of Asian Political Parties (ICAPP)	1946	Seoul	B.A. (Seoul National University)
Chief of Staff for Policy	Jang Ha-sung	Professor at Korea University	1953	Gwangju	Ph.D. (University of Pennsylvania)
Special Advisor on Diplomacy and Security	Moon Chung-in	Honorary Professor at Yonsei University	1951	Jeju	Ph.D. (University of Maryland)
Special Envoy to the U.S.	Hong Seok-hyun	Head of Korean Association of Newspapers	1949	Seoul	Ph.D. (Stanford University)

1 “문재인-트럼프 첫 통화...트럼프 ‘한미, 단순히 좋은 동맹 아닌 위대한 동맹관계,’” *중앙일보*, 2017년 5월 10일.

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3 “문재인 대통령, 日 아베 총리와 25분간 첫 통화 ‘위안부 합의, 우리 국민 대다수가 수용 못해 ... 역사 직시해야,’” *경향신문*, 2017년 5월 11일.

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