***Korea Global Forum 2013***

***Summary***

**The Korean Peninsula Trust-Building Process**

**Session:** 2

**Date/Time:** November 20, 2013 / 13:30-15:10

**Venue:**  Orchid Room (2F), The Westin Chosun, Seoul

**Moderator:** Choi Kang, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

**Speakers:** Chun Hae-Sung, Ministry of Unification, ROK

Chu Shulong, Tsinghua University

David Kang, University of Southern California

Vasily Mikheev, IMEMO

Lars-André Richter, Friedrich Naumann Foundation

Togo Kazuhiko, Kyoto Sangyo University

***Summary***

Mr. Chun Hae-Sung, the Assistant Minister for Unification Policy at the Ministry of Unification, started out Session II by pointing out the main underlying purpose of Park Geun-hye’s “trust politik” policy. He stated that the cause of many problems is the absence of trust or the loss of trust among nations in their relations. In particular with regard to inter-Korean relations and North Korean policy it is difficult to make progress without trust. The goal, therefore, of the Park administration is to foster trust through a balanced approach towards North Korea. The two-pronged approach consists of maintaining a firm deterrence stance to be prepared to respond firmly to any North Korean provocations while also at the same time continuing to be flexible and open to the possibility of engagement with North Korea in areas. According to Mr. Chun, the ultimate aspiration and hope of the Park administration is to lay the foundation for and make progress towards unification of the Korean Peninsula. Although the trust politik policy of the Park administration has been tested several times over the last year, the reopening of the Kaesong Industrial Complex demonstrates that progress is possible if a consistent stance is maintained. Since September 21st when North Korea postponed the reunion of separated families, inter-Korean relations have again entered into a deep freeze. However, the Park administration is determined to pursue a firm and principled position until NK demonstrates through concrete action that it is trustworthy and prepared to stop the development of its nuclear program. The ROK government will continue to seek strong support and cooperation with its allies and to remain focused on the goals of the trust politik policy.

Dr. Chu Shulong, professor of political science and international relations at Tsinghua University, asserted that “trust” is a fundamental element in relations between countries. The Park Geun-hye administration, he stated, has hit an important target by basing their “trust politik” policy on this factor. Professor Chu started his presentation by comparing inter-Korean relations with the relationship between China and Taiwan. A major reason why China and Taiwan maintain stable relations now is because they developed a certain amount of trust since 2008 and they also have a common final goal. Their shared goal of “one China” and the common agenda of economic development have allowed the two sides to cooperate and build up trust. People-to-people and cultural contacts have also allowed the relationship to develop in a positive direction. Prof. Chu suggested that if North Koreans and South Koreans followed the China/Taiwan experience they may build a greater amount of trust and achieve progress in inter-Korean relations. Social and cultural contacts can also make a large difference in breaking down barriers and overcoming challenges.

Dr. David Kang, professor of international relations and business at the University of Southern California, presented his view U.S. policy towards North Korea. He asserted that the U.S. rather fatigued by the North Korean nuclear issue and as a result strategic patience is the only game in Washington right now. Prof. Kang stated that the U.S. has no desire to try anything new with regards to North Korea because of the high chance of failure, but the US would strongly support ROK efforts to find creative solution. He stated that in among international relations scholars there is a tendency to focus on the concepts of power and coercion when discussing relations between countries. However, we all know that there are other ways of getting countries (and people) to do something. The positive aspect of the Park Geun-hye administration’s “trust politik” approach is that has changed the way the countries in the region are dealing with North Korea. The trust politik approach has forced others to widen their view of the various tools that can be used with North Korea. He asserted that this does not mean that the tools we used previously should be abandoned (i.e. sanctions) but it has enabled the conversation with North Korea to proceed in a more positive direction. Prof. Kang further argued that there are major changes occurring in North Korea and if we take a longer view of the situation, the changes that occurring because of this new approach could encourage North Korea to interact more consistently with the international community and to create a shift in its internal dynamics as well.

Dr. Vasily Mikheev, Vice President of IMEMO, commented on two aspects of the Park administration’s policy. He asserted that the international security environment has changed over the last twenty years and North Korea is no longer faced with the same situation. Russia and China are now developing into market-oriented economies and North Korea only has a security agreement with China that remains. If conflict arises, even with this security treaty China cannot be expected to respond in the way that North Korea may anticipate. He also stated that the Russian position is “build trust if you can” but the North Koreans have a very different view of trust and inter-Korean relations. They view the ROK first as a national enemy—meaning they have no trust of the South—and second as a source of money and aid. Even among the North Korean elites themselves there is very little trust he said, so Dr. it may be very difficult to expect North Koreans to reciprocate the kind of “trust” that the Park administration expects. However, he further maintained that although forming trust may be impossible with the highest level officials in the North Korean government it may be more feasible to build trust with mid-to-lower level officials who have knowledge of the lifestyle and economic aspects of South Korea. He argued that any policy aimed at building trust should focus on forming relationships and conducting exchanges with the officials at the lower levels as well as increasing North Koreans knowledge and information of the outside world. Finally, there should be a clear understanding of the final goals of the “trust politik” policy.

Mr. Lars-André Richter, representative from the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, discussed the role of non-governmental organizations in engaging North Korea. He advocated a pragmatic approach engaging North Korea based on economic development and the other based on the German experience of trust-building. The Park administration is currently trying to create a political environment that creates change and less hostile and more cooperative and it seemed to have positive outcome earlier this year but it may take time to work. The Kaesong reopening and plan to create new special economic zones indicate that NK is serious about improving its economy but the success of this kind of policy will depend on whether NK wants improved relations and to develop its economy in earnest. He asserted that an important question is if the international community is willing to support and provide help to stabilize the NK economy at this point in time. The German case shows that economic cooperation can slowly build trust that can lead to change but in the case of Northeast Asia regional cooperation and trust building among all the countries will be very crucial. In this light the new approach of the Park Geun-hye administration makes sense and may lead to positive progress if there is regional cooperation and integration that helps support the end goal of Korean unification in the future. Finally he stated that NGO’s such as the Friedrich Naumann Foundation are very eager to share our experiences in trust building and hope that this process will lead to peaceful unification and a prosperous and secure Northeast Asian environment.

Ambassador Togo Kazuhiko, professor at Kyoto Sangyo University, presented his perspective of Japan’s strategic thinking as it relates to North Korea. He asserted that Japanese strategic thinking was greatly affected by Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit to North Korea in 2002 because this ignited Japanese people’s emotions about the abductee issue. Since that time Amb. Togo argued that policy towards North Korea, and subsequently cooperation with Japan’s neighbors, had been “hijacked” by this issue. Japan has maintained a fairly hardline stance towards North Korea and in conjunction with the U.S. has continued to pursue a strong deterrence policy to prevent North Korea from engaging in further provocations. However, Amb. Togo stated that Japan is still open to making progress with North Korea through the Six-Party Talks or other dialogue mechanisms. Amb. Togo lamented about the current poor state of ROK-Japan relations that prevented the two countries from working more closely on the North Korean problem. The historical issues he argued were creating a vicious negative cycle that prevented the ROK and Japan from making progress on other important shared concerns and challenges. Amb. Togo highlighted Japan’s concerns about the rising power of China and the efforts to form a better relationship with Russia. He further asserted that the Japanese should think more strategically and positively about relations with the ROK and should make efforts to support the upgrading of South Korean defense capabilities. Lastly, Japan should coordinate with the ROK to help push forward efforts to denuclearize North Korea. He maintained that cooperation and coordination between the ROK and Japan was strategically important for regional peace and security.

During the question and answer session, Peter Beck, Korea representative for the Asia Foundation, asked Ambassador Togo how the ROK and Japan could break away from the vicious cycle of caused by historical issues. Amb. Togo responded that more effort is probably needed by the leaders of the two countries to resolve the issue in a practical and cool-headed way. He also stated that he support the Park administrations idea of multifaceted and multilateral strategic dialogue. Dr. Choi Kang asked Mr. Chun Hae-Sung to further elaborate on how the ROK government plans to consolidate domestic consensus on North Korean policy (given the political divide). Mr. Chun responded by stating that the Park administration is working hard to build trust domestically as well as internationally. The government is working hard to address the voices that are calling for engagement with North Korea and more visible results for improved inter-Korean relations. Lastly, Scott Snyder from the Council on Foreign Relations asked Mr. Chun his perspective on North Koreans’ mistrust of the Park administration’s trustpolitik policy. Chun replied that although North Korea does not yet trust the Park administration’s policy that the government would continue to send the DPRK a consistent message about engagement and to remain firm at the same time with a strong deterrent stance. He stated further that progress in inter-Korean relations should be made through the pursuit of a balanced approach of being ready to react firmly to North Korean provocations but also flexible enough to respond to North Korean overtures for dialogue and peaceful exchanges. Dr. Choi wrapped up the session by stating that two common themes from the presentations appeared to be that working on the North Korean problem requires multilateral cooperation and the formulation of a common vision among the countries in the region for the final outcome.