



[EAI Online Seminar] COVID-19 and New World Order Series 10:  
North Korea in a New Era of U.S.-South Korea Partnership

## **Finding the Right Balance with North Korea: Prospects for North Korea Policy**

East Asia Institute (EAI)

### **I. U.S.-ROK Relations and North Korea Policy**

#### **The Current Status of the Denuclearization Agenda**

- Efforts between the U.S. and North Korea in negotiating a denuclearization agreement are at an impasse – more than two years have passed since the leaders of the two countries last met. Kim Jong Un is likely to continue investing in North Korea's nuclear weapons program given that its nuclear arsenal is key to the regime's survival.
- Ms. Soo Kim, Policy Analyst at the RAND Corporation, states that while the U.S. should continue to indicate its willingness to negotiate, it should do so in the form of financial sanctions, criticism that harms the North's reputation, and strengthening alliances in order to leave Kim to negotiate for survival.
- Professor Jina Kim at the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies states that Biden will prefer to maintain the status quo instead of pursuing change if North Korea continues to stay unresponsive to the resumption of dialogue. Professor Kim argues that such a situation may lead to arms control becoming a more persuasive option to crisis management than arms control.
- Professor Kim asserts that North Korea is likely to focus on military modernization and engage in a tit-for-tat rivalry if it is seeking a new equilibrium on the Korean Peninsula. North Korea will avoid unnecessary escalation by walking away from its previous commitment to the moratorium of testing nuclear weapons and ICBMs, causing concern about the stability-instability paradox.

#### **Prospects for U.S.-ROK Coordination on the End-of-war Declaration**

- Dr. Sue Mi Terry, Director of the Hyundai Motor-Korea Foundation Center for Korean History and Public Policy at the Wilson Center, claims that the U.S. and South Korea are not on the same page regarding the end-of-war declaration. While the draft is expected to include clauses indicating that the declaration will not affect the status of armistice between



the two Koreas, it will not be easy to gain U.S. domestic support given that North Korea has not shown any inclinations to denuclearize.

- Dr. Terry adds that if Biden were to proceed with a declaration, he would have to reassure the U.S. public that the U.S.-ROK alliance remains as strong as ever, thereby reducing the declaration's attractiveness to the North.
- Ms. Kim states that while Washington is willing to discuss the declaration, it should question whether the declaration is sustainable amid the missile testing and nuclear development in North Korea and the leadership transition in South Korea – it is not well timed. Ms. Kim stresses that the declaration further bears the risk of estrangement between the U.S. and ROK and questions the presence of U.S. Forces Korea on the peninsula.

### Return to Strategic Patience?

- Professor Kim states that a return to strategic patience is not a good idea; maintaining the status quo does not guarantee stability. The absence of talks on confidence building may be conducive for choosing an arms race as the national course of action. Professor Kim stresses that the new government needs time — North Korea may test the waters if the new administration does not provide institutional mechanisms to continue talks with North Korea.
- Ms. Kim says that conditions at the moment are geared favorably towards the Kim regime – summits and negotiations are unlikely to help the U.S. regain the upper hand. While this does not mean that the U.S. should rule out the option of diplomacy, the U.S. must take into account that previous efforts to engage have only created opportunities for the Kim regime to buy time and build a bigger, more capable nuclear arsenal.

## II. Implications of the 2022 Presidential Elections on South Korea's North Korea Policy

### Key Differences between Candidates Lee and Yun

- Professor Jihwan Hwang at the University of Seoul explains that while Lee's policy can be described as a "peace-first policy," Yun's policy is considered "hardline policy" —both candidates are likely to inherit their predecessors' policies. Lee's policies are focused on bringing peace back on the Korean Peninsula based on the belief that the collapse or instability of the North Korean regime would neither directly lead to unification nor peace on the Korean peninsula. On the other hand, Yun's policies are focused on pressurizing Pyongyang to give up its nuclear weapons program and coordination between the U.S. and South Korea on sanctions.



- Professor Hwang adds that both candidates agree on the importance of the U.S.-ROK alliance, although differences may exist in how they perceive its role in maintaining the ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral alliance.
- Dr. Terry states that the election of either candidate entails opportunities and challenges. Risks under a potential Lee administration include disagreement between the U.S. and South Korea, but opportunities may be found if North Korea is open to dialogue. On the other hand, a potential Yun administration could negatively impact inter-Korean relations.

#### **Foreign and Domestic Policy Challenges For the Next Administration**

- Dr. Terry explains that the biggest concern South Korea faces in terms of the U.S.-ROK alliance is “abandonment vs. entrapment.” How South Korea will navigate this amid U.S.-China tensions is of question. She points out that South Korea is willing to chart its own course and that it must deal with China accounting for high levels of trade and North Korea.
- Professor Hwang states that the domestic policy environment the next Korean president will face is bound to be unfavorable. He points out that political polarization, both in terms of political orientation and generational gaps is a key domestic concern.
- On China, Professor Hwang claims that regardless of who gets elected, policy toward China will remain similar. South Korea’s foreign policy framework was geared towards strengthening the U.S-ROK alliance and improving ROK-China partnership simultaneously. He stresses that there is strategic room for the South Korean government to maneuver in East Asia. ■



### III. Speaker, Discussant, and Moderator Bios

- **Jihwan Hwang** is Professor in the Department of International Relations at the University of Seoul. Dr. Hwang's research interests include diplomatic policy and relationship between South and North Korea. He has published articles including "The Paradox of South Korea's Unification Diplomacy: Moving beyond a State-Centric Approach", "The Two Koreas after U.S. Unipolarity: In Search of a New North Korea Policy," "The Political Implications of American Military Policy in Korea: Learning from Theoretical and Empirical Evidences" and so on. He received a B.A. in Diplomacy from Seoul National University and his M.A. in Political Science from Seoul National University and University of Colorado. He received a Ph.D. in Political Science from University of Colorado.
- **Jina Kim** is Professor in the Division of Language and Diplomacy at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. Previously, she was Chief of the North Korean Military Division at Korea Institute for Defense Analyses and Adjunct Professor of Yonsei Graduate School of International Studies. She is on multiple advisory boards for the Republic of Korea Blue House National Security Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Unification, and Peaceful Unification Advisory Council. She also served as a member of the Advisory Board for the US-ROK Combined Forces Command and a member of the Policy Evaluation Committee for the Prime Minister's Office. She holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, and an MA in International Studies from Yonsei Graduate School of International Studies.
- **Soo Kim** is a policy analyst at the RAND Corporation and an adjunct instructor at American University. Her research interests include the Korean Peninsula, Russia, Indo-Pacific strategy, near-peer competition, decision making, propaganda, and the intelligence community. She served as an analyst in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and also worked at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Kim earned an M.A. in international relations/strategic studies at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), and a B.A. in French from Yale University.
- **Sue Mi Terry** is Director of the Hyundai Motor-Korea Foundation Center for Korean History and Public Policy. Prior to joining the Wilson Center, Dr. Terry served in a range of important policy roles related to both Korea and its surrounding region. Formerly a Senior Fellow with the Korea Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), she served as a Senior Analyst on Korean issues at the CIA. (2001-2008) She holds a Ph.D. (2001) and an M.A. (1998) in international relations from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University and a B.A. in political science from New York University (1993). She was born in Seoul and raised in Hawaii and Northern Virginia.
- **Andrew Yeo** is the SK-Korea Foundation Chair in Korea Studies at Brookings Institution's Center for East Asia Policy Studies. He is also a professor of politics and director of Asian studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. His most recent book publication is "State, Society and Markets in North Korea" with Cambridge University Press. Yeo received his doctorate in government from Cornell University, and bachelor's in psychology and international studies magna cum laude from Northwestern University.



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