

## **The Moon Administration's Multilateral Regional Diplomacy**

### *An Initiative of Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility*

**By Kim, Joon Hyung**

**Professor, Handong Global University**

**Member of State Affairs Planning Advisory Committee**



#### **Security Environments in Northeast Asia – The Revival of Geopolitics**

As the global great powers, the U.S. and China assertively confront against one another in Northeast Asia, where Korea is located, geopolitical tensions revived in the region. The South China Sea, the East China Sea, the Cross-Strait, and the Korean peninsula are turning into the borders of the power politics between the United States and China and becoming the fault lines of potential clashes of the two states' strategic interests. Furthermore, with the resurgence of exclusive nationalism, Xi's China and Abe's Japan are in conflict-ridden relations forming another front of the U.S.-China conflicts. Putin's Russia, in an attempt to revive the glory of the Soviet Union, approaches a rising China as part of its foreign policy strategy against the United States. As the Kim Jong Un regime's nuclear armament accelerates, the Korean peninsula is on the verge of reaching a critical point of actual deployment of nuclear weapons. The shutdown of the Kaesong Industrial Complex, the last bastion of the inter-Korean relations, and invalidation of all of the agreements that had regulated the relations began to make a return to a de facto Cold War period.

## **Inauguration of the New Administration and Its Vision of Foreign Policy –the Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility (NAPCOR)**

President Moon Jae In's administration took the helm of South Korea on 9 May in such vicissitude. During the election, President Moon elucidated his political agenda to lead a "Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility (NAPCOR)" for peace and growth through cooperation. Later on, it was selected as the 98th task among the 100 tasks of the State Affairs Committee. The NAPCOR is a mid-to-long term strategic plan for Korea's peace and prosperity, which uses the national standing of a developed nation to overcome the geopolitical vulnerability and to prepare for peaceful and prosperous future. President Moon advocated his will to take a leading role in achieving peace on the Peninsula at the ROK-U.S. Summit and G20 Summit held in Hamburg, Germany and gained a broad support. Based on the international support, the Moon administration will focus on establishing peace by solving the North Korean nuclear problem and improving the South-North relations. Simultaneously, it will actively seek to expand its presence into Asia, Eurasia, Europe and Africa, not to mention Northeast Asia, as a farsighted national policy.

Implying meanings of "to upgrade" and "to expand" as well, the word "Plus" has three-fold implications. It is indisputable that Northeast Asia is the core region that is directly linked with South Korea's survival and therefore must be considered as the top priority. If constrained within the boundary of Northeast Asia, however, South Korea will be engrossed in its survival and may cause a worsening of the recent security dilemma and the East-West bloc rivalry. Thus, the term "Plus," in a spatial aspect, implies the expansion of its presence into the ASEAN, Mongolia, India, the U.S., Australia, Russia, and Europe. Moreover, in terms of issues, "Plus" implies the expansion into mutual economic prosperity and socio-cultural fields, which goes beyond the concept of political survival to include values-oriented diplomacy and public diplomacy. And lastly, it holds the intention to inherit and develop the regional vision that was sought in the establishment of the Presidential Committee on Northeast Asian Cooperation Initiative during the Roh Moo-hyun administration.

On the other hand, another keyword "Responsibility" from the phrase represents the political agenda of the Moon administration emphasizing governmental responsibilities in national security, public safety, and the national care for dementia, etc. Along with the level of sincerity on multilateral cooperation in the keyword's simplest meaning, the ROK aims to develop a binding community that can ultimately hold each member state responsible. The initiative proposes four progressive phases. At the initial phase, the initiative urges the member states to participate in creating a plan that can actually be implemented with sincerity, instead of a mere political rhetoric based on groundless imagination that cannot guarantee action. The

second phase revolves around the spirit of pursuing the same objective while respecting the differences to achieve co-existence. The third phase urges the member states of Northeast Asia Plus Community to harbor a sense of accountability in achieving peace and prosperity and overcoming the existing crises and conflicts. Lastly, though it may seem difficult at this moment, the final phase is to build a cooperative order for prevention of war and prosperous peace among the member states and to share legal liabilities thereof.

### **Three Pillars of the Initiative of Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility**

The NAPCOR initiative is composed of three pillars, namely a Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Platform, a New Nord-politik, and a New Sud-politik. Whereas the Platform aims at happiness, the latter two pursue prosperity. In the situation where conventional multilateral cooperation has a short history and the alliance order prevails, the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Platform aims to alleviate the security dilemma caused by the U.S.-China strategic rivalry, expand the external links, diversify and intensify issues, and pursue institutionalization through multilateral cooperative diplomacy led by South Korea. The NAPCOR initiative of the Moon administration is not disconnected with the preceding Park administration's Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative or NAPCI for short.

The establishment of mid-to-long term peace for South Korea's future can only be effectively implemented when accompanied by a strategy to seize a new growth momentum. Consequently, the Moon administration has listed the active implementation of New Nord-politik and New Sud-politik as major national political agenda. In an era of restructuring the international order, China, Russia, and Japan attempt to incorporate South Korea into their spheres of influence by pushing for the One Belt One Road Initiative, the New Look East Policy, and the "Diplomacy with a bird's eye view of the globe," respectively. In response to their attempts, the NAPCOR initiative is South Korea's mid-to-long term strategy for survival and prosperity. It is also linked with a New Korean Peninsula Economic Map, the H-shaped region created by the trans-East Sea, trans-Yellow Sea, and the military demarcation line. In other words, the Moon administration seeks to actively carry out a grand plan to overcome the crisis on the Korean peninsula through an active reconciliation policy for the South-North relations. Also, it seeks to circumvent the security dilemma of Northeast Asia with the new northern and southern policies.

The New Sud-politik is closely related to President Moon's repeated statement that he will elevate the levels of diplomacy and closeness with the ASEAN and India to those of the neighboring four great powers. The ASEAN is not only South Korea's second largest partner for trade, investment, and construction but also a region where the largest number of Koreans visit.

The region also has the most robust presence of the Korean culture. At the same time, the relationship with the ASEAN has recently shown a rapid development with its fast growing importance; thus, it is necessary to actively improve the relationship. Along with the economic position, it is important for Korea to secure a strategic position amid the U.S.-China conflict. While elevating the level of Korea-ASEAN relationship is crucial, it is necessary to strengthen the diplomatic ties with South Asian states. Cooperation with India, among other states, is a matter of the utmost importance. Furthermore, Korea should strengthen its cooperation with Australia and New Zealand as much as possible.

The New Nord-politik promotes mutual cooperation and acquires new growth potentials by connecting transportation, logistics, and energy infrastructure with Eurasian nations. Along with the New Sud-politik, it simultaneously attempts to gain a next-generation economic growth potential by creating new jobs and maintaining growth in order to become a country taking both continental and maritime advantages. The Moon administration's blueprint for diplomacy, national security, and unification is, in short, peace on the Korean Peninsula. It pursues a "responsible national security" as well as advancement in national interest, domestic life, and mutual prosperity through peace. This concept aligns with the famous saying of the renowned sociologist, Johan Galtung, that national security through peace is much better than peace through national security. In order to overcome the complexity, instability, and uncertainty of the external environment facing us, we need to make a peace-leading nation through an autonomous strenuous diplomacy. We have to overcome the current security dilemma and security populism by engaging in serious peace discourse, to alleviate tensions by actively improving the South-North relations, and to expand the room for maneuverability. The long-cherished dream of unification must also be a part of our long journey to peace. Peace is the means to and the goal of the South's policy towards the North. Its starting point is improvement in the inter-Korean relations, and the destination will be peace in Northeast Asia. By building a multi-layered multilateral strategic dialogue network that goes beyond the United States, China, Japan, and Russia, South Korea should play the pivotal role of a buffer of conflict when the U.S.-China relations deteriorate and a facilitator of cooperation when their relations ameliorate.