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The U.S.-China Conflict and South Korea's Foreign Policy and Security Strategy

Dr. HONG Hyun-ik

(hyunik@sejong.org)

Senior Research Fellow, the Sejong Institute

English Abstract

The U.S. and China are competing for supremacy in the new Cold War. In particular, the U.S. is bashing China for the purpose. It is problematic for South Korea as the Trump administration has been pressuring the South Korean government to adopt hostile policies toward China, such as taking joint action for freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, participating in the Economic Prosperity Network (EPN) to economically isolate China, cutting off transactions with Huawei, and even deploying medium-range missiles in the Korean Peninsula.

Although North Korea's provocation against South Korea in June was caused mainly by domestic political reasons, the action implies that North Korea is determined to pass on the failures of internal and foreign affairs to the South Korean government. Backed up by China's support, which has become more powerful in the midst of escalated tension between the U.S. and China, Pyongyang intends to blame Seoul for the criticism it has been receiving from its people for misgovernance.

In short, South Korea is diplomatically attacked from various directions. North Korea continues to threaten with all kinds of provocations. China is unlikely to take any favorable action not until President Xi Jinping visits South Korea. Meanwhile, the U.S.—an ally—constantly asks South Korea to regard China as an enemy and participate in blocking and besieging China. The tension between the U.S. and China is

likely to continue for the long term as a course of hegemonic competition; nonetheless, it is expected to remain at a certain level until the U.S. election in November.

For South Korea to overcome such diplomatic, and security, crises, the government must wisely engage in all-encompassing diplomacy. If, as claimed by North Korea, South Korea could not implement the agreement that was agreed between two Koreas because South Korea could not coordinate all issues with the U.S. and the U.S. was against the agreement, then South Korea must improve its system so that it can first independently implement necessary policies and then notify the U.S.

In response to the U.S. demand for a sharp increase in defense costs, South Korea should suggest that it may be harmless to reduce 10,000 troops from an excessive deployment of the U.S. troops of 28,000. Such will not only relieve the burden on the United States but also prevent any negative impact on the South Korean government—in case the U.S. announces first that it will consider reducing its troop level. Furthermore, it will also work positively on the transfer of wartime operational control, help the South Korean military to be mentally armed, and improve inter-Korean relations.

Ultimately, it should be noted that the ROK-U.S. alliance was established to deter North Korea's provocations or North Korea's invasion of South Korea. In other words, the South Korean government must clarify its basis of foreign policies as "all-encompassing peace, cooperation, and prosperity," and declare that it will follow the request of the U.S. when it is fully in line with such principle. ❖

※ Translator's note: This is a summarized unofficial translation of the original paper which was written in Korean. All references should be made to the original paper.

※ This article is written based on the author's personal opinions and does not reflect the views of the Sejong Institute.