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I. ROK Weekly Report

1. Introduction

Introduction ("ROK Weekly Report", 2007-08-24) This week's report focuses on the North Korea policy of former Seoul mayor Lee Myung-bak, who was nominated on Monday to be the presidential candidate of the main opposition Grand National Party. Liberal commentators accused Lee of being

inconsistent in his stance on the upcoming ROK-DPRK summit meeting, and argued that inter-Korean reconciliation should not be put aside during the presidential campaign. Conservative newspapers, on the other hand, used the occasion to reiterate their demands that the summit should be put off till after the election to allow the incoming administration more say.

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2. Changing Stance on Summit

Kyunghyang Shinmun ("LEE MYUNG-BAK'S CHANGING STANCE ON SUMMIT TALKS CONFUSING", 2007-08-23) wrote that at a February press meeting at the Foreign Correspondents' Club, Lee Myung-bak, presidential candidate from the Grand National Party, stated, "I disagree with an inter-Korean summit when there is only a year left until the presidential term ends." On August 8, after the announcement of the summit talk, he said, "I would not disagree summit talk if it is helpful for DPRK abandoning nuclear programs." On August 21, in the presence of Cardinal Kim Soo-hwan, he said, "Wouldn't negotiating with the presence of nuclear weapons mean accepting the nuclear programs?" Lee's constant changing of his stance on the summit talk has aroused criticism. "As the leading presidential candidate, accentuating different possibilities for political purposes rather than coming up with constructive suggestions and productive solutions is a conversion of means and ends," said Hong Hyun-ik, senior analyst at the Sejong Institute. National Assemblyman Park Hyung-joon, a supporter of Lee, explained, "Candidate Lee has claimed that the summit talk must succeed without being used for political purposes." Hong noted, "Lee must seek for a way to enhance the solution for the DPRK nuclear issues by taking advantage of the opportunity given him."

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3. Postpone Summit Till After Election

Chosun Ilbo ("SUMMIT TALK CAN BE POSTPONED FOR ONE MONTH, BUT NOT TILL AFTER THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION", 2007-08-22) wrote that, in the presence of Cardinal Kim Soo-hwan, presidential candidate Lee Myung-bak said, "I am worried because if President Roh makes an agreement on a bunch of things, the next president will have to realize them." It was the result of President Roh commenting, "If I go there and make agreements with Kim Jong-il's signature, the next president will have no choice but to honor them." The Grand National Party also demanded that since the summit talk has been postponed already, President Roh should rather pass it to the next president or at least have a conversation with the newly elected president before making any decision. Then the government criticized Lee that he is hindering the president's national administration. After the summit talks between October 2-4, in 76 days a new president will take office. President Roh may also know that in this kind of situation, running an effective summit is impossible. It seems that the summit talk has more meaning in its "timing" rather than the contents or effectiveness.

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4. Korean Peninsula Issues Can't Wait

Hankyoreh ("LEE MYUNG-BAK, GNP KICKING OFF AGAINST SUMMIT", 2007-08-24) wrote that both the candidate Lee Myung-bak and the Grand National Party are actually making clear their opposition to the summit talks in early October this year. Candidate Lee accentuates that the GNP must change its color and function, implying that they will try to free themselves from their nationalistic image. However whether this reformation is for real or not is doubtful, because the

GNP's conservative image is mainly due to its outdated policies concerning the DPRK. The logic that having a summit talk now can be interpreted as accepting the DPRK's nuclear program implies that the ROK, until the DPRK nuclear issue is solved, cannot do anything concerning the Korean Peninsula. Claims made by candidate Lee and the GNP about the summit talk clearly illustrate their attitude to regard a national agenda as a political factor in a presidential election. This is not how a party that aims to run the administration in the future should look. The Korean Peninsula situation is not at leisure to change the diplomatic schedules according to the domestic political state. Solutions to nuclear issue, establishment of a Northeast Asia peace structure, and of a DPRK-ROK economic community, must be done simultaneously.

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5. Roh Policy a Failure

Decision 2007 ("LEE MYUNG BAK SAYS 'EMBRACING POLICY OF ROH ADMINISTRATION A FAILURE'", 2007-08-24) wrote that while leading ruling party candidates assess the government's DPRK policy as beneficial to peace on the Korean Peninsula, Lee Myung-bak, the presidential candidate of the GNP, defined it in one word: failure. Candidate Lee said, "President Roh's North Korea policy could neither prevent the nuclear experiment and missile launch nor induce the opening and reform of the DPRK." Lee argued that "without North Korea's nuclear disarmament, Korea-US relations will be harmed" and that if he succeeds in holding the office he would "organize a Korea-US security alliance surveillance committee based on the people, and reassess carefully the state of Korea-US relations during the last ten 'lost' years." About the West Sea Northern Limit Line issue, Lee stated, "the area can be shared for May and June during fishing season for a limited period; however, since the NLL is a national territory issue, it can never be re-established." Lee has also explained that only when the proper conditions -- improvement of DPRK-ROK relations and fundamental reformation in the ROK strategy of the DPRK -- are met can national security issues be re-examined.

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6. International Cooperation on DPRK

Yonhap News ("CANDIDATE LEE'S PLEDGES ON FOREIGN POLICIES", 2007-08-21) wrote that Lee's pledges on foreign policy are aimed at developing benefits for the country and establishing peace on the Korean Peninsula and in Asia based on "strengthening the ROK-U.S. relationship." It's unique in the way that rather than approaching the DPRK issue from the standpoint of a divided nation, it approaches the issue with a more international point of view in cooperation with foreign countries. Lee, while agreeing with the idea of the DPRK opening its doors, has been criticizing the Kim Dae-jung administration's "Sunshine Policy" that it was just one-way support with nothing in return. As an alternative, Lee has suggested bringing changes through the help of foreign countries. But some people interpret this as meaning he would keep the U.S.'s pace, rather than walking at our own pace, and worry that when the DPRK-U.S. relationship worsens, the ROK might not be able to play a bridging role between them. On the other hand, Lee's pledges of playing a supportive role in global society through increased foreign aid and stronger relationships with other Asian countries is evaluated as a unique merit of his pledges.

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7. Denuclearize, Open Economy, 3000

Yonhap News ("FOREIGN POLICIES OF CANDIDATE LEE", 2007-08-21) writes that Lee Myung-bak's DPRK policy's key points are "Denuclearization, Open economy, and 3,000," meaning that once the DPRK agrees to denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and open its doors, the ROK, with the help of global society, will support the DPRK so it will achieve a GDP of US\$3,000. According to this plan, the ROK will support the DPRK to grow 100 export companies, empower 300,000 people in industry, collect US\$40 billion from the global society, construct new superhighways, and provide them with food and medical equipment to overcome poverty. He also promised to build an ROK-DPRK cooperative industrial complex called "Nadeulsum," at the southern part of the Han River. Regarding the summit meeting, he showed no objections if the agendas were set as denuclearization and return of kidnap victims.

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8. Ambiguities in Lee's DPRK Policy

Kukmin Ilbo ("LEE'S POLICIES ON NORTH KOREA STRESSES GRADUAL APPROACH, FLEXIBILITY", 2007-08-22) reported that presidential candidate Lee Myung-bak's policy toward North Korea, which was more progressive than what the Grand National Party had originally planned, is now more conservative than the GNP's platform. On the other hand, one of Lee's suppositions, which is to call for the abandonment of the DPRK's nuclear program is considered to be ambiguous on whether it is merely to "shut down" the nuclear program, or to disable or to dismantle the whole program. Moreover, he has not explained yet on how to deal with emergencies such as resumption of nuclear tests. Also, since economic support for the DPRK is more likely to be one of the means of pressuring it to end the nuclear program, there exists a possibility of damaging the inter-Korean relationship. Even though the US Trading with the Enemy Act made it become problematic to export goods from the Kaesong Industrial Complex, Lee has not even mentioned what the current status is, and kept looking at the problem too ideally.

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