# NAPSNet Daily Report Friday, March 30, 2007

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## 1. Introduction

("ROK Weekly Report: March 30, 2007", ) This week's report focuses on the negotiations for an ROK-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which has been the subject of intense debate and demonstrations in Seoul. Critics in civil society and the liberal press attacked the FTA as an attempt to further US hegemony in the region, and worried about its effect on inter-Korean reconciliation. Conservative media was generally supportive of the agreement, both on economic ground and in the interest of strengthening US-ROK relations.

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## 2. FTA Furthers US Hegemony

In an open letter to President Roh Moo-hyun, PSPD (People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy) ("PUBLIC LETTER TO PRESIDENT ROH", 2007-03-27) states that U.S.-ROK FTA will harm peace in the Korean Peninsula. It says that the reason U.S. is pushing bilateral FTAs, like the U.S.-ROK FTA, and not a multilateral FTA such as WTO or DDA, is not only because they are aiming for economical hegemony in Northeast Asia, but also because they want to strengthen and maintain the political and military hegemony, and consequently, the enforcement of the U.S.-ROK FTA might instigate conflict and tension in the Northeast Asia.

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## 3. Trade Agreement Can't Solve Political Problems

Wonhyuk Lim of KNSI (Korea National Strategy Institute) ("TO REALLY FILL UP THE CRACK BETWEEN THE U.S. AND ROK", 2006-08-31) writes that the fundamental reason the U.S.-ROK FTA is unjustifiable is because it is being pursued based on the decision to recover from the current damaged U.S.-ROK relationship through this agreement, rather than to observe the requirements carefully and then decide. The article states that the damaged relationship should not be fixed by FTA, but instead should be recovered through negotiations on the direct problems between the two countries. Also, it claims that in the process of FTA negotiation, the ROK government must make sure products from Kaesong industrial zone be admitted as ROK products because this would mean that the U.S. is supporting the DPRK's legal economic activities. This would also mean that both the U.S. and ROK are overcoming the conflict on DPRK.

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## 4. Parties Wrangle Over FTA

Voice of the People ("U.S.-ROK FTA AND NORTH-SOUTH CONFLICT DISTURB POLITICS", 2007-03-16) writes that the U.S.-ROK FTA and DPRK-ROK conflicts are becoming major political issues. The Uri Party and Democratic Labor Party (DLP) remain strongly against the FTA, whereas the Grand National Party (GNP) has not yet distinctly expressed its attitude. The Uri Party's floor leader, Youngdal Chang, stated "the U.S. should not demand too much from the ROK government, or else it might be hard to pass the National Assembly." Dongyoung Jung, the former chairman, also said that "the U.S.-ROK FTA is an unfair agreement," and that he "opposes that the negotiation being progressed only favors the U.S."

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## 5. National Reconciliation Should Trump FTA

R Report, 9th Issue ("NORTH-SOUTH RECONCILIATION POLICY AND THE U.S.-ROK FTA POLICY'S PECULIAR SHARE, Corea Institute for New Society", 2007-03-30) writes that in the year 2007, with the elections coming up, the top national subject is to activate the DPRK-ROK reconciliation and cooperation plan by developing the 6.15 joint declaration and in the meantime, stop the U.S.-ROK FTA and look for an alternative economic system to neo-liberal economics. It stresses the necessity of finding a concrete direction to a unified economy and claims that the peace forces and the anti-neo-liberal forces must come together.

(return to top) Changbi Weekly Commentary ("NORTH-SOUTH SUMMIT MEETING AND THE U.S.-ROK FTA", 2007-03-21) says that it isn't believable that the U.S.-ROK FTA negotiation is being proceeded "in the direction of benefit with its chief aim completely on actual profit in the economy," as claimed by the president a few weeks ago, and that it will have severe effects on the DPRK-ROK relationship. It writes that negotiating about peace in the ROK Peninsula between the two presidents is meaningless without wartime control, and a president cannot discuss about the economy's balanced development when the government's public policy can be brought before the court by the U.S.'s investors anytime. (return to top)

## 6. FTA Has Majority Support

A Maeil Economy editorial ("MAEIL ECONOMY EDITORIAL", 2007-03-29) said that a low quality FTA from the beginning was not what the two countries wanted and the actual benefit from it will also be very restricted. For some of the issues that do not meet an agreement, a built-in method which leaves further possible controversy can be applied. There are dissatisfactions for both nations, yet if accomplishing FTA is a benefit, a determination to do so must be made. Some politicians, NGOs, and farmers are against FTA but there are still the majority of people for it. Direct resolution and determination from President Roh is expected.

(return to top) A Joongang Ilbo editorial ("THOSE FOR FTA, SPEAK UP", 2007-03-29) said that it is a curious thing is that only anti-FTA activists are demonstrating while those for FTA are discouraged by the fervent demonstrations. The ones who will most benefit from FTA are the consumers. However, the consumers are currently reluctant to speak out. Corporate leaders have also disappeared. The passive and secretive attitude the ROK government imposes in negotiation is problematic yet the beneficiaries' reluctance to be heard is even worse. (return to top)

## 7. FTA a Win-Win Game

A Hankuk Ilbo editorial ("EXPECTING WIN-WIN FOR BOTH KOREA AND US IN FTA", 2007-03-29) said that the ROK, in principle, supports FTA. The time limit for the negotiation is approaching, yet the two countries still seem to have a difficult time coming up with a compromise. Securing the balance between the benefits of two countries, rather than fighting over a particular product, is a factor that will affect the final decision. Both the ROK and US are expected to accomplish the compromise not for myopic benefits but rather for long-term cooperation and harmonious developments.

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## 8. Government Must Consider National Benefit

A Hankyoreh editorial ("NATIONAL BENEFIT BEFORE PRESIDENT'S CONVICTION", 2007-03-30) said that people cannot criticize the president for taking responsibility of a pending issue, but it is problematic if what President Roh meant was to accomplish FTA against all the oppositions and criticism because of his conviction to do so. Many are concerned that the current government is not negotiating on the primary principle of national benefit with standards but rather is treating the whole accomplishment of FTA as a task. There is no obligation for Korea to finish the negotiation in time limit that US came up with. Obviously, the two governments would prefer finishing this before President Roh's term in office, but this issue is to be treated with a more prudent approach. We hope that President Roh stays loyal to the principles.

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## 9. FTA Could Spur Anti-Americanism

A Kyunghyang editorial ("US, HOPE TO SEE THE BIG PICTURE AT THE FINAL COMPROMISE", 2007-03-27) said that asking US who is already very much economically open to further open the economy with the same degree Korea is opening its economy is difficult. If the compromise happens to lean to one side, public persuasion and Congressional ratification will be difficult. If it is later evaluated as unfair for the ROK, FTA has a potential threat of exacerbating anti-American sentiment.

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## 10. President Must Show Leadership

A Chosun Ilbo editorial ("A WELCOME TO TWO SUMMIT'S POLITICAL VOLITION FOR FTA", 2007-03-29) said that two summits through phone call have reaffirm the political volition to increase common interest through compromise and ordered negotiations to be done with the most flexibility, which is very fortunate. The ROK-US FTA depends on what path the ROK chooses to take: to open and compete to strengthen its economy or to stay under the shelter and wait for it to collapse. It is time the leader should make the decision and encourage the people to step forward to a better future. People expect to see President Roh opening the last door to become a developed country with his own hands.

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