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Asan Roundtable with Enrique Mora and Ambassador Gonzalo Ortiz

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On Tuesday, September 8, 2015, the Asan Institute for Policy Studies held a roundtable with Enrique Mora and Ambassador Gonzalo Ortiz. Mr. **Enrique Mora** is the Director General for Foreign Policy and Security at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain. He had previously served as the Director General for Foreign Policy and Multilateral, Global and Security Affairs (2014-2015), Director for Policy Planning (2010-2014), Deputy Head and later Head of the Private Office of the High Representative of the European Union (2005-2009), Deputy Director General for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (2002-2005), and Deputy Director General for Central and Southern Europe (1996-2000). Ambassador **Gonzalo Ortiz** is the Spanish Ambassador to the Republic of Korea. He had previously served as Consul General of

Spain in Shanghai (2011-2014), Australia and New Zealand (1996-1999), and Brazil (1990-1993).

Enrique Mora started off the discussion by raising three key points for discussion: 1) the impact of North Korea, 2) the future of Six Party talks and regional security cooperation, and 3) the role of China and US-China tensions on the current state of affairs in South Korea specifically and East Asia more broadly.

Dr. Go Myung-Hyun, Research Fellow with the Center for Public Opinion and Quantitative Research at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, first shared his thoughts on the future of the North Korean regime to state that inter-Korea relations are shifting. Recent developments represent the first time that North Korea has approached South Korea for talks since the 1970s. Dr. Go posits that these behaviors reflect the way Kim Jong Un's image has changed, and that "what North Korea wants [from South Korea] is the lifting of economic sanctions" as well as to be recognized as a nuclear state. Concerning the future of Six Party Talks, Dr. Go believes that there is no future until a new administration takes over in Washington. At present, "only China insists on continuing the talks as an umbrella mechanism to discuss North Korea issues and influence its image and prestige in the region." Ultimately, Dr. Go holds the view that Six Party Talks will not lead to any breakthrough anytime soon as "even if Kim Jong Un wants to inform his country, he does not have the intellectual capability to carry it out." Lately, Kim has been constructing waterparks, museums, and ski slopes for the use of the North Korean people, but these projects only reveal his detachment from the realities of North Korean society and a lack of long-term solutions for his state. Moreover, North Korea's economy is primarily driven by commodity exports, especially the export of cheap coal to Chinese steel mills. Dr. Go concludes that "North Korea will face an interesting challenge with balancing the expectations of his people (who have gotten used to better things in life and raised expectations about the future)" with a downturn in the economy as commodity prices drop.

Mora then directed the conversation towards regional security issues with regards to North Korea nonproliferation and a possible regime collapse. Dr. Go shared his perspective on the need for the region to reduce the negative impact of a possible North Korean regime collapse, emphasizing that a reunification will be an international endeavor, not just limited to inter-Korean affairs. Dr. Lee Jaehyon, Research Fellow with the ASEAN and Oceania Studies Program at the Asan Institute of Policy Studies, also explained that during the cold war, the regional order was dominated by the US and "there had been no chance for East Asian nations to develop greater confidence." Now

that East Asia is provided the chance to build regional security cooperation, there is a lot of uncertainty about how to do so. As Dr. Lee points out, “East Asia countries are still very young, especially compared to the European case. As young countries, [East Asian countries] initially had no chance to look back, but now they are looking back, and strong nationalism is emerging. The whole environment is against the building of regional and security in this part of the world.” Hence, Dr. Lee believes that it will be difficult to build a collective system akin to NATO, but it will be important for East Asia to learn from European nations.

Dr. Choi Kang, Vice President of the Asan Institute of Policy Studies, raised the view that the “US has a preference for maintaining structural order in the region, [but] China has more preference for a bilateral alliance system...[that] is much stronger in promoting peace and stability.” Dr. Choi does not believe it will be possible to have a collective security system or proper alliance with China for two reasons: firstly, there is still a strong preference for a US alliance, and secondly, there is “no fear or mutual destruction or a holocaust” and so “China, Korea, and Japan think that they can use force as necessary.” This absence of fear hinders multilateral cooperation. Moreover, the rise of China creates strategic dilemmas for South Korea. In Dr. Choi’s view, South Korea and China share only one thing: market economy. As he elaborates, “it is uncertain whether Xi Jinping will be able to overcome domestic problems, and we anticipate he will be preoccupied with domestic issues for the next two to three years... Everybody used to think that China will keep growing fast and prop up the regional economy, but now everybody worries about the Chinese economy. For South Korea, both the US and China are indispensable.” The main issue is that the US-China relationship is very complicated and too interdependent, and it will be “almost impossible” for South Korea to bring the two powers together.

Lastly, Ambassador Ortiz asked about South Korea’s view towards Russia given its security issues, economic problems, and behavior towards Ukraine. As he explains, “recent sanctions applied to Russia mean business. Russia cannot finance itself in European markets in the Euro or American markets in USD. They need money, but financial markets are not providing enough, particularly with oil prices very low, Russia could be on the brink of an economic collapse.” Nonetheless, Russia is the so-called neighbor of Northeast Asia and an important ally for South Korea. Dr. Go responded by clarifying that East Asia is generally “neutral to Russia, as it is nice to the region... [because] it wants to claim influence.” He points to the case where “Russia was actually pleading with North Korea to allow it to build a pipeline and sell its natural gas” and

precede the development of US shale gas exports from the West coast to Asia. Hence, Russia “wants to explore more of natural resources in Asia” as the region represents its future customers and a “huge windfall for Russians.”

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Place: Conference Room (2F), The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

Reported by: Rachel Leng