

BİLGESAM ANALİZ/ANALYSIS



**From Moon's engagement to Yoon's Harsh
Rhetoric: A New Era on Korean Peninsula**

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From Moon's engagement to Yoon's Harsh Rhetoric: A New Era on Korean Peninsula

Yoon Suk-yeol won the Presidential election held in South Korea in March 2022. Yoon took office at a time (May 10, 2022) when North Korea has recently tested an increasing number of new weapons in and around the Korean peninsula and tensions between the parties have increased, nuclear talks with the United States have come to a deadlock since 2019, and Washington sought to strengthen three-way security cooperation with Seoul and Tokyo amid missile and nuclear threats from North Korea.

During his inaugural address, President Yoon stated that the North Korean nuclear issue is an issue that threatens peace not only in the Korean Peninsula, but also in Asia and the wider world. Yoon emphasized the importance of keeping dialogue channels open so that this threat can be overcome peacefully. Yoon also talked about cooperation as he does not want to deepen the social divide in South Korea, as he avoids a confrontational stance towards North Korea. On the other hand, he added that he would be able to provide economic aid to North Korea if Pyongyang halts and suspends its nuclear development and moves towards denuclearization.

In his speech, Yoon called for the establishment of a preemptive strike capability to deter North Korea's nuclear and missile attacks, and the deployment of additional missile defense systems by US forces stationed in South Korea. It is very important for Yoon to have close consultations with Washington so that he can achieve his goals. Compared to the previous Moon Jae-in administration's softer stance on Beijing and Pyongyang, Yoon clearly emphasized relations with Tokyo and Washington. Moreover, last April, Yoon took the first step towards strengthening and developing relations by sending a number of delegations of his assistants and experts to Japan and the United States to lay the groundwork for his diplomacy. In the personnel affairs of his new administration, he stated that his administration would strengthen the alliance with Washington and appointed academics known for their closeness to the United States to key positions.

The new South Korean leader is poised to deal

with Pyongyang on firmer ground, based on what his predecessor called the "submissive" approach. Yoon called the North Korean leader "a rough boy" during his election campaign and said, "if you give me a chance, I will teach him some manners". Moreover, after a missile test carried out by North Korea on May 11, 2022, Yoon described it as a "provocation".

For the past five years, the Seoul government under Moon Jae-in has been pursuing a policy of engagement with Pyongyang. Having met Kim four times while on duty, Moon had carefully avoided using harsh one-on-one rhetoric by prioritizing engagement with Pyongyang. Moon mediated summits between North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un and the US President Donald Trump, and pursued a policy of reducing joint US military exercises, which the Pyongyang administration saw as provocative. But talks failed in 2019, with North Korea conducting 15 weapons tests in 2022, including the launch of its largest ever intercontinental ballistic missile

What Does Japan Expect from the New Seoul Government?

Japan hopes that its new president, Yoon will turn to close cooperation with Japan and the United States to increase deterrence on the Korean Peninsula. In addition, Japan considers that South Korea should re-strengthen joint military exercises with the United States, which had previously been reduced in size and scale over the last years. Japan believes that South Korea, which it sees as a country with which it shares the values of freedom and democracy, should further strengthen its cooperation with Japan and the United States in order to cope with threats from North Korea and China.

After attending the inauguration ceremony of South Korea's new president, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi told the press on Tuesday, May 10, that Japan and South Korea agreed that their frayed relations could be improved, and that President Yoon wanted to develop ties by maintaining close communication. "South Korea is an important country, and cooperation is indispensable for the stability of this region, including the response to North Korea."

Hayashi said. In addition, he said, referring to the cooperation between Japan, the United States and South Korea, "We agreed that we should not allow Japan-South Korea relations to deteriorate."

In fact, the new administration in Seoul and Tokyo see the new period as an important opportunity to improve their relations. However, there are a number of disputes between the parties over the bitter legacy of Japan's occupation of Japan between 1910-1945, the issue of comfort women, forced labor in wartime, and the dispute over sovereignty over the Dokdo/Takeshima islands in the East China Sea to export controls. It is a matter of curiosity whether these problems can be overcome between the two parties in the new period. The Tokyo administration expects the new Yoon administration to take concrete steps. The Tokyo administration seems ready to act flexibly in solving the problems, in case the new Seoul administration sees concrete steps towards solving the problems.

North Korea's Stance

The new president, Yoon's stance on North Korea, seems to have already bothered him with this harsh Pyongyang administration. On May 12, the North Korean propaganda website, 'Uriminzokkiri' said that Yoon had incited a "skirmish frenzy" and that it was "unwise" to discuss preemptive attacks. Also, on May 5, another North Korean propaganda website denounced South Korea's new president Yoon Suk-yeol, who promised to take a tougher stance against Pyongyang's weapons tests, calling his "pro-US" and "conflictual".

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un said last month that North Korea would increase its nuclear arsenal "as fast as possible", after Yoon won the election in March, who voiced his harsh stances against North Korea and its leader during his election campaigns. Satellite images now show that Pyongyang may be preparing to resume nuclear testing. Meanwhile, Pyongyang's nuclear tests had been stopped since 2017.

The Korean Peninsula is currently one of the most important flashpoints in the world. The North Korean nuclear issue is an issue that threatens peace not only in the Korean Peninsula, but also in Asia and the wider world. Therefore, the new policy that the new administration will follow has the potential to affect not only the future of Northeast Asia, but also the future of the world. We are now entering a new era in the region with the new government of Seoul, and this period represents a break from the previous administration's policy of engagement. As a result, time will show whether or not, Yoon's policy of increasing deterrence by strengthening

cooperation with Japan and the United States will be a realistic policy. But, the truth is that for Yoon, stopping North Korea's efforts to develop its nuclear program will definitely not be an easy task. The call by Seoul for Kim to give up his nuclear weapons first may be considered an obstacle that the North cannot and will not accept. That is, it means that Moon's policy of engagement has been definitively terminated.