

Issue Brief, The Summaries

Vol.68, No.41, 2022

The 30th Anniversary of ROK-China Diplomatic Relations and Peace on the Korean Peninsula

Zeno Ahn (Senior Research Fellow, INSS)
Su Seok Lee (Senior Research Fellow, INSS)

INSS

INSTITUTE FOR NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

국가안보전략연구원

The 30th Anniversary of ROK-China Diplomatic Relations and Peace on the Korean Peninsula

Zeno Ahn (Senior Research Fellow, INSS)

Su Seok Lee (Senior Research Fellow, INSS)

The reality of great power competition and the intensified strategic rivalry between the U.S. and China have put countries such as South Korea in a precarious situation with a dilemma to choose a side. Any strategic situation poses a challenge for South Korea and may weaken its diplomatic ground in the volatile geopolitical landscape. As South Korea and China commemorate the 30th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations, it seems timely to examine the tasks of both countries for peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

South Korea anticipates a greater role from China in securing peace on the Korean Peninsula as regional stability is also a crucial interest to Beijing. In addition, China needs to appreciate the grave reality surrounding the Peninsula and the necessity for a ROK-U.S. alliance.

South Korea and China need to lower their expectations and make adjustments accordingly, to derive a positive role from China. Both countries need to review their bilateral ties, with Beijing checking if it had expected to

wean Seoul away from Washington, and Seoul reflecting if its past behaviors had misled Beijing and had contributed to such an illusion.

The bilateral relationship should first meet the minimum expectations of South Korea and China and then gradually seek to expand the roles and contributions of both countries. South Korea needs to carry out its foreign policies in a transparent manner with strategic clarity, while China should strive to implement a realistic policy stance toward South Korea.

Seoul should make efforts to diversify its trading partners and reduce its dependency on Beijing as a strengthened alliance with Washington may weaken its ties with Beijing. Hence, the South Korean government should consider to employ strategic clarity rather than strategic ambiguity in its relations with China. In addition, cooperative agendas in the region need to be identified and promoted to garner expanded consensus among South Korea, China and other countries. South Korea also needs to demonstrate clarity in its foreign strategy and policies for an expanded cooperative agenda. Regarding their bilateral ties, Seoul and Beijing need to shift their perspectives and devise a new and creative strategic partnership.

Keywords: ROK-China Diplomatic Relations, Strategic Cooperative Partnership, ROK-U.S. Alliance, Strategic Clarity