

Chung Eui-yong, the ICAPP and the Korea Summits

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The influence of South Korea's National Security Advisor played a key role in the two recent North Korea summits.

By Kenichi Suzuki
June 18, 2018

Last week, U.S. President Donald J. Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un met in an historic summit in Singapore. The meeting produced a [statement](#) that called for: (1) a normalization of U.S.-North Korea relations; (2) the building of a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula; (3) the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula; and (4) the immediate repatriation of the POW/MIA remains from the Korean War.



Both this June 12 summit and the inter-Korean summit in April owed much to the efforts of South Korean National Security Adviser Chung Eui-yong, who met with both Kim and Trump in March as a special envoy for South Korean President Moon Jae-in and secured their commitment to proceed with the summits.

What explains Chung's success? The pivotal factor was his ability to win the trust of Kim Jong-un. In fact, Kim was dubious about the merits of an inter-Korean summit, until he met with Chung in March. Chung was able to persuade the North Korean leader to accept Moon's offer of a meeting.

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After holding the diplomatic posts of Korean Ambassador to Israel and Korean Ambassador to the UN, Chung entered politics in 2004 and held the post of Diplomatic Committee Chairman in parliament. Chung was appointed Co-Chairman of the International Conference of Asian Political Parties (ICAPP) in 2007, holding that post until he was tapped as South Korean National Security

Adviser in May 2017. Over the years Chung has built an extensive network throughout Asia, one that includes heads of state such as Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri. In more recent years, Chung has extended that network to politicians all over the world. This background clearly served Chung well when he met with Kim and Trump in rapid succession.

Following his meeting with Kim on March 5, Chung met with Trump on March 8, with Chinese President Xi Jinping on March 12 and with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on March 13. At each meeting, Chung briefed his interlocutor on the progress of negotiations on the Korean Peninsula, earning their support. Without the trust Chung had built through the ICAPP, he would have found it difficult to meet with the leaders of these countries in such a short period of time. Even someone like Hitoshi Tanaka, who played a leading role in improving Japan's relationship with North Korea under the Koizumi administration as the then-Director-General of the Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, would have found it tough to replicate Chung's schedule.

Speaking about the ICAPP, Chung once observed that its, "conferences are friendly, constructive and effective with a clear vision. By mobilizing Asian political leaders through friendly regular meetings, the ICAPP works as a positive force for boosting mutual understanding among Asian countries and peoples." Initially, the ICAPP's management style of holding meetings regardless of ideology, principles or whether its members were from ruling and opposition parties was criticized as lacking in sustainability. Yet it has evolved into the preeminent Asian forum for political dialogues, maintaining its principles.

It is very likely that his experiences with the ICAPP served Chung well in his meeting with Kim, allowing him to show the tolerance for North Korea's style that would have earned him the trust needed to persuade the leader to take part in the summit.

What is the ICAPP?

At ICAPP meetings, attendees engage in frank exchanges of opinions, irrespective of standing and title. When I attended the ICAPP Special Conference on the Silk Road, held in Tehran in February, I found myself sitting opposite a former Nepalese head of state who was dining alone, and we enjoyed breakfast together. These kinds of encounters produce friendly relationships that I believe helped Chung on his recent history mission.

The ICAPP was founded in 2000 at the initiative of Jose de Venecia Jr., a former Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Philippines, with the aim of promoting Asian regional cooperation through political parties' original roles and channels.

There are a number of international political party organizations, such as the Socialist International, the International Democrat Union and the Liberal International. All were established on the basis of ideology. The sole requirement for the ICAPP, however, is that political parties have a certain number of seats in parliament, irrespective of ideology, religion, or whether or not they are in power. Currently, 360 political parties in 52 Asian countries are eligible to participate in the ICAPP.

The ICAPP has a Standing Committee of 38 ruling and opposition leaders from 23 countries that represent different Asian regions. The committee meets at least twice a year and plays a central role in the planning and activities of the ICAPP. For Japan, the Liberal Democratic Party and the Democratic Party (as of May 2018) are members of the Standing Committee.

An Asian Community

The 8th General Assembly, which was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka in September 2014, made the proposal to expand the framework of regional peace cooperation, including ASEAN, to the whole of Asia under the theme of "Constructing an Asian Community." The 9th General Assembly, which was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in September 2016, confirmed the ultimate goal of "Asian Community" and "One Asia" under the theme of "One Asia."

Today, the ICAPP is Asia's largest political forum, and a place where politicians can speak freely about issues they could never discuss in detail at official intergovernmental and United Nations meetings. In recent years, the ICAPP has held regular meetings with the Permanent Conference of Political Parties of Latin America and the Caribbean (COPPPAL) and the Council of African Political Parties (CAPP), as well as among Asian countries. The ICAPP launched the Asia-Europe Political Forum (AEPF) with European political parties, holds earnest discussions about issues facing the international community and works closely with them to solve these issues. The ICAPP aims to establish a global forum involving all political parties, and cooperates with party conferences on each continent on a phased basis.

Its effectiveness has never been more evident than in the events of the last several months.

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