

Impact Players

Hwang Joon-kook

By Andy Lim

Who is he?

Hwang Joon-kook is the new Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs for the Republic of Korea (ROK), which means he is the country's top delegate for the Six-Party Talks. Ambassador Hwang is a career diplomat, serving most recently as the ROK Ambassador for Defense Burden-sharing, the ROK's top delegate for the 9th Special Measures Agreement (SMA) between the US and ROK, which was signed successfully in January 11 of this year. Previously, he served as the Deputy Chief of Mission and Minister for Political Affairs at the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Washington, DC from February 2010 to April 2013. Prior to that, he was the Ambassador for North Korean Nuclear Issues and Director General for North Korean Nuclear Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Service from 2008 to 2010. Hwang first joined the ministry in 1982 and some of his other high-level assignments included serving as the Director of the Protocol Division (2000-2001), the Director of the UN Division in MOFAT (2001-2003), Political Counselor in charge of Security Council affairs at the UN (2003-2006), and Assistant to the Foreign Minister (2008). Ambassador Hwang received a Bachelor's of Art in Economics from Seoul National University in 1982 and a Master's in Public Affairs from Princeton University in 1986.

Why has he been in the news?

Ambassador Hwang's appointment as the ROK's new top nuclear envoy was announced by the Blue House on April 3. His appointment comes less than two months after the post was vacated by his predecessor, Cho Tae-yong, who was promoted to vice foreign minister in late February 2014. Ambassador Hwang's appointment comes less than a week before a trilateral meeting of nuclear envoys from the U.S., Japan and the ROK will convene in Washington, DC on April 7. This will be the first trilateral meeting since the envoys last met in Washington on November 6, 2013. The April 7th meeting marks the first time Ambassador Hwang will work together with his American and Japanese counterparts, incumbents U.S. Special Representative for North Korea Policy Glyn Davies and Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director General for Asian and Oceanian Affairs Junichi Ihara.

What can we expect from him?

Ambassador Hwang brings a wealth of diplomatic experience and negotiation capability to the table, as demonstrated by his successful negotiation of the difficult 9th U.S.-ROK Special Measures Agreement earlier this year. His achievement, in reaching a new five-year cost-sharing plan on the maintenance of the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) in the ROK, was a display of his ability to balance sensitive interests and strike compromises. That skill will be much needed when he negotiates with his two partners next week, and even more should the full Six-Party Talks reconvene. The trilateral April 7 meeting is timely because it comes during a time of heightened tensions on the Korean Peninsula. North Korea threatened on March 30 a "new form" of nuclear test, exchanged live-artillery fire with South Korea on April 1, and has conducted numerous rounds of ballistic and projectiles tests since February 21. Furthermore, the trilateral meeting comes at the heels of the first trilateral summit between President Barack Obama, President Park Geun-hye and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on March 25 at The Hague. Therefore, the onus is strong to further the momentum on improving trilateral cooperation.

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