

From Nuclear Talks to Regional Institutions: Challenges and Prospects for Security Multilateralism in Northeast Asia

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Introduction

North Korea's nuclear aspirations have served as the driving force for the development of ad hoc security multilateralism in Northeast Asia. This development has occurred in stages, with each successive phase in responding to the North Korean crisis resulting in strengthened regional cooperation, despite persisting underlying strategic mistrust among the parties. This presentation will briefly evaluate the significance and contributions of three stages in the development of ad hoc security multilateralism in Northeast Asia: KEDO, the Four-Party Talks/establishment of the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG), and the Six Party Talks. Then, the author will offer a critical evaluation of prospects for Six Party Talks and analyze whether the six party process might develop into a permanent feature of the security architecture in Northeast Asia or whether a fourth stage might be necessary to achieve a lasting security framework for the region. The author will also evaluate the extent to which the North Korean nuclear issue and the U.S.-led bilateral alliance system, respectively, may be both a catalyst and an obstacle to the establishment of an effective Northeast Asian regional security framework.

Development of Ad Hoc Security Multilateralism in Asia

North Korea's unilateral pursuit of a nuclear weapons capacity has ironically been the primary catalyst for new the development of new forms of multilateral security cooperation in Northeast Asia during the past two decades. Although there had been official calls for the development of a regional security forum prior to the emergence of the North Korean nuclear issue, it was only in the context of responding to the North Korean nuclear issue that such ideas took concrete form.

Tangible forms of regional cooperation in response to North Korea's nuclear challenge have developed on an ad hoc basis through three phases since the early 1990s. The first phase came in the aftermath of a bilateral agreement between the United States and the DPRK, the Geneva Agreed Framework, signed on October 21, 1994. That agreement called for the establishment of the Korean Peninsula Development Organization (KEDO), an international organization that operated outside of governmental channels but was under the supervision of the governments that constituted KEDO's governing board. In the late 1990s, new doubts about North Korean covert nuclear activities and a desire to move forward in addressing peace and security issues on the Korean peninsula led to the establishment of the Four Party Talks, which served as a primary political vehicle for engaging North Korea in the aftermath of the food crisis of the late 1990s. A separate "minilateral" institution also developed during this period, the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG), which consisted of high-level governmental

representatives from the U.S, Japan, and South Korea. The third stage in the development of ad hoc security multilateralism in Northeast Asia came with the establishment of the Six Party Talks as a mechanism for dealing with the second North Korean nuclear crisis, following the discovery of an alleged covert North Korean program designed to develop nuclear capabilities through a uranium-enrichment path. This development also marked the demise of KEDO. At this writing, the Six Party Talks is in crisis, and may possibly be replaced by a fourth stage in the development of multilateral security cooperation in Northeast Asia, possibilities for which will be explored later in this paper.

a) KEDO

The 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework that froze North Korea's nuclear program and tied full denuclearization to the provision of two 1000-megawatt light water reactors was a result of bilateral negotiations between the United States and North Korea. But it became clear in the course of negotiating such an agreement that a multilateral body would have to be created to oversee the implementation of the Agreed Framework. This result was a tacit admission that while bilateral negotiation that developed between the United States and North Korea at the behest of the United Nations from May of 1993 was necessary but not sufficient to address the North Korean nuclear issue. Thus, the Agreed Framework authorized the establishment of a multilateral consortium named the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), to implement the terms of the deal. North Korea reluctantly was forced to accept the necessity of South Korean and Japanese technical and political involvement in the project, and even came to accept KEDO as a legitimate counterpart, albeit under an authorization that ultimately originated in a bilateral U.S.-DPRK agreement. This tension in the relationship between the U.S.-DPRK bilateral relationship and the development of multilateral approaches to North Korea would persist as a theme and as a contentious issue in subsequent multilateral approaches to the North Korean issue.

The establishment of KEDO was a practical step forward in forging multilateral cooperation to meet North Korea's energy security needs as a solution to the North Korean nuclear crisis. KEDO's governing board included representatives from Japan, South Korea, the United States, and the European Union, but China and Russia declined to participate in the project.¹ Thus, KEDO provided a unique institutional framework through which Japanese and South Korean diplomats worked with each other together with U.S. colleagues. Such a development was not insubstantial, given the tragic historical pall that hangs over Japan-ROK relations. But as an exercise in building regional cooperation, the core membership was incomplete. The multilateral nature of the KEDO process also had collateral benefits in promoting inter-Korean technical contacts and indirectly contributed to an improvement in inter-Korean relations in advance of the advent of South Korea's "Sunshine Policy" in 1998 under then-president Kim Dae Jung.

¹ Scott Snyder, "The Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization: Implications for Northeast Asian Regional Security Cooperation?" University of British Columbia Working Paper Series, 2000.

b) Four Party Talks/TCOG

The next phase in the development of multilateral security cooperation in Northeast Asia was marked by two multilateral approaches in the late 1990s. The Four Party Talks were established in 1997 by the United States, China, North and South Korea in an attempt to promote confidence building measures and move from an armistice to a peace regime on the Korean peninsula. Although the actual four party proposal was a product of a political need on the part of South Korea to provide political justification for President Clinton to come to South Korea, the forum did eventually get off the ground despite North Korea's initial reluctance to participate. A famine-stricken North Korea tied its participation to the provision of food aid from the United States through the UN World Food Programme, but the North Koreans showed little interest in pursuing substantive dialogue beyond their commitment to participate. Ironically, a significant accomplishment of the four party talks was to lay the foundations for Chinese cooperation with the United States and South Korea rather than the achievement of any significant progress on problems involving North Korea.

At the same time, the later 1990s saw the establishment of the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) among the United States, South Korea, and Japan. At the same time, suspicions about covert North Korean nuclear efforts at Keumchangri (later proved unfounded) and North Korea's Taepodong launch in 1998 catalyzed the establishment of TCOG to address differences in policy priorities among the three countries.² This group was established as a by-product of a review of U.S. policy led by former Defense Secretary William Perry. Through the TCOG process, the United States, Japan, and South Korea supported cooperative efforts to engage North Korea in more active cooperation on the basis of Kim Dae Jung's sunshine policy.

c) Six Party Talks

The six party talks was established in the wake of revelations in October of 2002 that North Korea had been pursuing a covert uranium enrichment program. These revelations, which became public in the wake of Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly's visit to Pyongyang for talks with North Korean officials, led to the unraveling of the Agreed Framework. The discovery of the violation of the spirit if not the letter of the Agreed Framework led to a spiraling crisis as North Korea kicked out International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors, reprocessed spent fuel rods stored under the Agreed Framework, and resumed production of bomb-grade fissile material by re-starting its 5 megawatt nuclear reactor in December of 2002 and January of 2003.

Drawing on perceived lessons from the experience of the Clinton-era Agreed Framework, the Bush administration sought a venue for multilateral dialogue rather than bilateral dialogue with North Korea. Those lessons included the perception that a bilateral negotiation with a duplicitous North Korea would enhance the likelihood that the North would fail to live up to its agreements, the recognition that the North Korean nuclear

² Dennis C. Blair and John T. Hanley, "From Wheels to Webs: Reconstructing Asia Pacific Security Arrangements," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Winter 2001), p. 7.

issue was in fact a Northeast Asian regional security problem as much as a challenge to the national security of the United States, that other parties had both leverage and a strategic stake in preventing North Korea from attaining nuclear weapons, and that U.S. leverage/pressure by itself would not be sufficient to convince North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons pursuits. The establishment of the six party process represented a third step in the evolution of multilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia focused on North Korea-related matters, building on the multilateral experience of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) and the four-party talks/TCOG experiences of the late 1990s.

A prerequisite for the establishment of the six party talks was China's more proactive response to a renewed nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula, in contrast to China's passive response during the first North Korean nuclear crisis of the 1990s. Motivated in part by concerns that the U.S.-DPRK confrontation of early 2003 might lead to a military conflict, Chinese leaders initially brokered a three-way U.S.-PRC-DPRK meeting in April of 2003, a meeting which led to the establishment of the six party process with the inclusion of South Korea, Japan, and Russia as participants in the talks in August of that year. China's multiple roles as a host, broker, mediator, and stakeholder in the six party process have given Beijing multiple incentives to promote the continuation and the success of the process as a vehicle for achieving denuclearization on the Korean peninsula.

The primary achievement of the six party talks to date has been the crafting of a Joint Statement on September 19, 2005. This statement commits all the parties to a lowest-common denominator shared set of common principles or objectives: a) denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, b) normalization of bilateral diplomatic relations among members of the six party talks, c) the importance of economic development, including provision of economic assistance for North Korea, d) the establishment of a permanent peace on the Korean peninsula. Since this is the first time that the parties in question have identified common interests, the Joint Statement might be seen as a minimalist version of the Helsinki Final Act principles agreed to by the Conference on Security Cooperation in Europe during the 1970s.

However, following the negotiation of the Joint Statement, the talks were suspended for almost a year as a result of North Korea's negative response to the U.S. designation of Banco Delta Asia (BDA) as a threat to the international banking system as a result of North Korean alleged money laundering and counterfeiting activities through accounts at BDA. The North Koreans suspended their participation in the talks following a November 2005 meeting. The talks did not resume until December of 2006, following North Korea's nuclear test and in a context in which the United States indicated a willingness to resolve the BDA issue with North Korea.

Following North Korea's nuclear test, the six parties ratified elements of an agreement that had been worked out at a bilateral U.S.-DPRK meeting held in January of 2006. The February 13, 2007 implementing agreement laid out steps that the six parties would take to provide North Korea with energy assistance and to remove North Korea from the U.S.

terrorism list and Trading With the Enemy Act in return for North Korea's disablement of the facilities at Yongbyong and declaration of its nuclear-related facilities. Originally envisioned to be implemented within ninety days, the clock ran out on the Bush administration's efforts to achieve a satisfactory understanding regarding how North Korea's declaration of its facilities might be verified. In a speech to The Asia Society prior to her first visit abroad as Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton signaled the Obama administration's continued commitment to the six party process.

Future of the Six Party Talks at a Moment of Crisis

Following a rapid and aggressive series of missile and nuclear tests by North Korea in April and May of 2009, the six party process once again finds itself in crisis. In response to the UN Security Council's April 13, 2009 Presidential Statement condemning North Korea's missile launch, the DPRK foreign ministry responded a day later by stating that "six-party talks have lost the meaning of their existence *never* to recover" and that the "DPRK will *never* participate in such six-party talks nor will it be bound any longer to any agreement of the talks."³ Although all the other parties have indicated their continued commitment to the six party process, many analysts believe that the six party process is finally dead.

This is not the first time that commentators have declared the talks to be dead. A thirteen-month hiatus surrounding the 2004 U.S. presidential election raised similar doubts among many analysts. The on-again, off-again nature of the six party process has been a major reason for criticizing the talks as ineffective and for seeking alternative organizing principles, including the possibility of establishing a five party process.⁴ However, China has continuously refused to sign on to such a process. As a result, the six party process has in some ways been held hostage to the peculiarities of the North Korean agenda: the talks can't meet unless North Korea agrees and North Korea's participation ensures that the talks will focus on North Korea. China refuses to participate in five party talks for fear that such talks would further alienate the North, despite the fact that the long-term establishment of an effective regional security dialogue in Northeast Asia will depend on the development of an agenda for the region that goes beyond North Korea. Now that the talks are off again, it is natural to question whether such talks can really be useful in promoting an effective and lasting diplomatic solution, but the six party talks offer the following unique advantages over the alternative diplomatic paths currently available:

- The six party talks are the only venue in which the North Koreans have made a public commitment to denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. The September 19, 2005 Joint Statement clearly states that the end goal of the six party process is "denuclearization of the Korean peninsula." This means that any implementing

³ KCNA statement, April 14, 2005.

⁴ Many commentators have been suggesting such a process, including Francis Fukuyama at a January 2005 conference on regional security architecture sponsored by the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

agreements developed as part of the six party process should include naturally include elements designed to implement that objective. Conversely, the abandonment of the six party process might serve North Korea's strategic objective of promoting its acceptance as a nuclear weapons state, absolving North Korea of the denuclearization commitment it made as part of the six party process.

- The six party process continues to serve as an umbrella for bilateral discussions designed to implement the objectives of the talks. Among the objectives of the six party talks is the normalization of bilateral relations among all the parties; thus, the six party process naturally contributes to the achievement of this aim. The process implicitly underscores the principle that improved bilateral diplomatic relations among the main parties are a development beneficial to the promotion of regional peace and stability.
- The six party process may also be a means by which to pressure individual countries that attempt to resist or deny the agreed-upon objectives and regional consensus embodied in the September 2005 Six Party Joint Statement. The commitment to the implementation of the Six Party Joint Statement has stimulated bilateral and trilateral consultations among members of the six party talks designed to implement the shared goals and consensus embodied in the six party process.
- The United States commitment to six party talks has become the primary tangible means by which the United States is able to demonstrate its continued commitment to North Korea's denuclearization in light of increasing skepticism that North Korea will abandon its nuclear weapons. In light of doubts and concerns across the region that the primary diplomatic objective of the United States may shift from denuclearization to non-proliferation, thereby tacitly accepting a nuclear North Korea as an acceptable part of a new regional status quo, it is particularly important that the United States remain committed to implementing the agenda of the six party talks.

The challenge of reconstituting the six party process as a viable means by which to address regional security in Northeast Asia is a daunting one, in light of North Korea's announcement of its withdrawal from the talks. But the commitment of the other parties to the six party process despite North Korea's statement that it would "never" return to the six party process sends an important signal to North Korea regarding the regional commitment to North Korea's denuclearization. North Korea's early challenge to the Obama administration over the shape of diplomatic engagement is also a test that will shape the agenda and form of diplomacy going forward. How the Obama administration responds to this challenge will influence its future prospects for success.

At this moment, there are many reasons to think that the six party talks is dead, and that events have finally outstripped the rationale underlying such a process. But it is also

important that the core regional commitments to denuclearization, peace, stability, and economic development of North Korea not be abandoned. Any new process that takes the region backwards or unravels such a consensus will ultimately not serve the best interests of all parties to the talks. For this reason, the focus of diplomacy should remain the reestablishment of the six party process rather than settling for a lesser alternative or going back to a less complete form of diplomatic interaction that privileges bilateral talks to the exclusion of a role for North Korea's neighbors to ratify and affirm their stakes and interests in any negotiated outcome with North Korea.

*Prospects for the Development of a Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism*⁵

Some analysts have pointed to the six party process, as the latest stage in the development of ad hoc multilateral approaches to the North Korean nuclear challenge, as having arguably laid the foundations for the development of a permanent regional security mechanism in Northeast Asia. The September 19, 2005, Joint Statement of the Six Party Talks provides a barebones lowest common denominator set of principles that might form the basis for common action in the sphere of regional politics and security, essentially identifying the objectives of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, normalization of diplomatic relations among all six parties, economic development on the Korean peninsula, and the pursuit of a permanent peace regime as the basis for future cooperation.

As the lowest common denominator set of agreed principles among major parties in Northeast Asia, the Joint Statement has laid a foundation for regional cooperation that is somewhat analogous to the role of the Helsinki Final Act, which provided the basis for institutionalization of security cooperation in Europe through the Committee on Security Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).⁶ However, the Joint Statement provides a much more narrow mandate for promotion of regional cooperation than did the Helsinki Final Act, suggesting that the basis for institutionalized regional security cooperation in Northeast Asia remains much more narrow than was the case in Europe in the 1970s. James Goodby argues that the operationalization of a Northeast Asian peace and security mechanism along the lines of the Helsinki Final Act might draw on language regarding freedom of travel and contact and the establishment of military confidence building measures, some of which have already been agreed to but never fully implemented in the 1992 inter-Korean Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-aggression, Exchanges and Cooperation (known as the Basic Agreement).⁷

⁵ This section draws from Scott Snyder, "Prospects for a Northeast Asian Security Framework," presented in October of 2008 at the Korea Economic Institute-sponsored conference with the Hans Seidel Foundation.

⁶ James Goodby and Markku Heiskanen have argued that a regional understanding analogous to that represented by the Helsinki Final Act in Europe will be a necessary component of a new regional security architecture in Asia. See James Goodby and Markku Heiskanen, "Emerging Regional Security Architecture in Northeast Asia," Nautilus Institute Policy Forum Online 08-001A, January 3, 2008.

⁷ James Goodby, "The Emerging Architecture for Security and Cooperation in Northeast Asia," *Issues and Insights*, Vol. 8, No. 3, Honolulu, HI: Pacific Forum CSIS, March 2008.

Following the announcement of the February 13, 2007, six party talks implementing agreement that outlined the first steps to be taken toward denuclearization and normalization of relations between North Korea and the United States and North Korea and Japan, the six parties have formed five working groups, including one to establish a Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism as a multilateral vehicle for promoting security beyond the settlement of the North Korean nuclear crisis. The creation of the Northeast Asia Peace and Security working group as the single working group that has been envisioned to outlast the six party process shows that all the participants in the six party talks have now officially accepted in principle the idea of a permanent, institutionalized regional security framework, although there are clearly differing ideas about how such a mechanism would work in practice. One might argue that despite the provisional nature of the Six Party Talks, with its sole focus on the North Korean nuclear issue, the establishment of the Six Party Talks is in fact an institutionalized multilateral mechanism in Northeast Asia.

Some have argued that the establishment of the six party talks itself has had positive collateral influence in terms of promoting confidence building among the parties, developing habits of cooperation, providing venues for bilateral cooperation even in the context of strained political relations, and providing a vehicle for managing tensions related to the North Korean nuclear crisis. But differing perspectives among the countries on the utility of the six party process suggest that these positive contributions do not necessarily guarantee that the six party talks will be institutionalized or lead to the establishment of a regional security mechanism.⁸ Jack Pritchard has suggested that the key ingredient currently missing from the establishment of a Northeast Asian security architecture is U.S. leadership, and that there is an emerging set of common interests (transparency, avoidance of miscalculation, peaceful dispute resolution, disaster relief, energy security, pandemic response coordination, and avoidance of incidents at sea) in support of which all the regional parties should be willing to join together.⁹

Perceived Challenges to the Development of a Permanent Northeast Asian Regional Security Mechanism: North Korean Nuclear Issue

If the Six Party Talks represents the first step toward the institutionalization of security cooperation in Northeast Asia, its establishment also suggests that the role and prospects for such an institutional dialogue beyond dealing with the North Korean nuclear issue may also face significant obstacles. First, the focus of the Six Party process solely on North Korea has the effect of limiting the capacity and utility of the talks to address traditional and non-traditional regional security issues beyond North Korea. By this logic, once the North Korean nuclear issue is no longer with us, it is hard to imagine a

⁸ Sheila Smith, "Assessing the Six Party Talks in NE Asia: Some Relationships Flourish, Others Suffer," Korus House presentation, May 22, 2008, accessed at http://www.dynamic-korea.com/korus_house/kh_view_news.php?main=KHF&sub=&uid=200800232641&keyword=, October 10, 2008.

⁹ Charles L. Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy: The Tragic Story of How North Korea Got the Bomb*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007, pp. 169-186.

security agenda that would successfully mobilize full and constructive participation by all the parties at the negotiating table. Instead of envisioning the institutionalization of a multilateral security forum that will grow out of the six party talks, it may turn out that the six party talks is already a multilateral security forum but that the salience of that forum is directly tied to the existence of North Korea-related issues as problems to be resolved.

Despite the “in principle” acceptance of the concept of a Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism to be established beyond the North Korean nuclear crisis, it is hard to imagine on which issues the mechanism would generate a value added that would have unique application to Northeast Asia or go beyond the contributions of, for instance, the ASEAN Regional Forum in addressing issues unique to the stability and security of the region. Contrary to the conventional wisdom that it is necessary for the six party talks to show success in order to provide the basis for a Northeast Asian regional security mechanism, it is possible that such a mechanism may be more likely to become semi-permanent in the event that North Korea-related issues continue to be a preoccupation and a focal point for regional cooperation on a protracted basis—or that North Korean political stability and economic reconstruction be adapted as an agenda for regional cooperation that extends beyond the nuclear issue itself.

Second, if North Korea were not the focal point of the talks, it is questionable under current circumstances whether any other issue would be “big” enough to mobilize effective regional dialogue and cooperation. Functional or non-traditional security issues may be addressed in other fora and do not inherently capture the same level of priority among participants in the six party talks. It is difficult to imagine that Northeast Asia’s great powers would allow bilateral territorial or political disputes to be regionalized, even if those issues have spillover security effects on the rest of the region.

Third, the reluctance of the six parties to meet without North Korea illustrates the extent to which North Korea continues to control the agenda for the talks despite the common regional interests in stability and co-prosperity that are threatened by North Korea. North Korea’s presence changes the nature of the dialogue and inhibits frank conversation regarding the collective interests and priorities of the other regional actors, yet it has also been impossible thus far for regional actors to discuss their common interests openly in the absence of North Korea. Despite efforts by the Bush administration to hold such a meeting and recommendations from several quarters that advocate the establishment of a Northeast Asia Regional Forum to address security, energy, health, and economic issues, the fact that it has thus far been impossible to establish a Northeast Asian five party dialogue for fear of what the North Koreans will think—even if the proposed agenda is not North Korea-focused—illustrates the extent to which North Korean issues both hold regional dialogue hostage as well as the difficulty of having a regional dialogue that does not focus on North Korea.¹⁰ The dysfunctional nature of the six party talks in this respect

¹⁰ See Ian Bremmer, Choi Sung-hong, and Yoriko Kawaguchi, “Northeast Asia: Defusing a Dangerous Region,” *International Herald Tribune*, December 30, 2005 (<http://www.ihf.com/articles/2005/12/29/opinion/edbremmer.php>, accessed on October 10, 2008). Francis Fukuyama has also called for the United States to take the lead in devising a new security architecture in

is not establishing a proper foundation upon which to build a longer-term institutionalized framework or venue for discussion of common interests in security and prosperity.

The current crisis raises the question of whether a fourth-stage multilateral security dialogue might develop to replace the third stage. For instance, if North Korea were to permanently end its participation in the six party process and China were to accept the validity of a five-party “contact group” through which to discuss the challenges posed by North Korea, this five-party discussion might mark such a new stage in the evolution of multilateral security cooperation in Northeast Asia. The advantages of such a dialogue would be that it would promote the possibility of an effective collective response that might finally compel North Korea to address the core issues related to its nuclear program. It is also possible that there could be a reversion to one of the previous stages that has already been delineated above.

*Northeast Asian Regional Security Mechanism:
Implications for America’s Asian Alliances*

A second issue that continues to draw considerable debate related to the establishment of a multilateral security architecture in Northeast Asia is the question of whether such a structure should serve as a replacement for or as a complement to the existing U.S. bilateral alliances with Japan and the Republic of Korea. It has become standard practice for Chinese to characterize the concept of alliance as a legacy of the Cold War and to underscore the need to abandon alliance thinking in favor of security multilateralism as a more suitable model for preserving cooperation among states in the future, while conventional wisdom among American analysts is that there is no contradiction between America’s Asian alliances and the establishment of a multilateral security framework in Northeast Asia.¹¹ In fact, some American analysts may argue that common values among democratic states may enable the expansion of tasks in the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-ROK alliances, and that those tasks might be synchronized as part of a regional approach to cooperation that emphasizes common objectives of both alliances to maintain regional stability. This sort of approach also sees an important role for the U.S.-led alliance network to play a balancing role in the context of China’s rise, for instance, in the context of the idea of a League of Democracies proposed by presidential candidate John McCain in 2008.

Because the alliances have served American interests well for so long, there is a hesitancy among American analysts to feel a strong need for innovation in this area or to respond to Asian desires for enhanced regional cooperation, especially in the security sphere. If the impetus for East Asian community building were to take off, such a

East Asia, possibly through the establishment of five party talks. See Francis Fukuyama, “Re-envisioning Asia,” *Foreign Affairs*, January-February 2005, pp. 75-87.

¹¹ For instance, see Tang Shiping, “China and Korea in East Asia: Possibility for Collective Actions?” Paper presented to the Korea Association of International Studies conference on “China and Korea in the 21st Century,” August 23-24, 2002, Seoul, Korea. See also Liu Jiangyong, “Creating a Peace Regime in Northeast Asia,” The 3rd Hankyoreh-Busan International Symposium, “After 2007 Inter-Korean Summit: The Role of Two Koreas for Peace in Northeast Asia, November 13-14, 2007, pp. 265-271.

development would have an indirect impact on U.S.-led alliances to the extent that the establishment of cooperation lessens security dilemmas faced within the region and lays the foundation for cooperative security. But Japan's incomplete reconciliation with the rest of Asia over history, an ongoing regional rivalry between China and Japan, and the perceived need to hedge against the negative possibilities that might result from China's rise make it unlikely that the United States or its allies would be convinced to abandon the alliance framework in favor of cooperative security anytime soon.

The United States is already pursuing regionalism in its response to North Korea's security challenge by attempting to mobilize a coordinated response through the six party process. This effort recognizes that the issue cannot be resolved satisfactorily using only deterrence and bilateral talks. The emergence of six party talks recognizes that the North Korean nuclear issue will require the collective involvement of all the parties neighboring North Korea if such a deal is going to "stick." Again, the six party mechanism is a tool to be used in conjunction with alliance cooperation, not supplanting the alliances with another form of security structure in Northeast Asia. For most American analysts, the idea of multilateral dialogue as a supplement to the alliances as a foundation for assuring peace and stability in Northeast Asia is quite reasonable, but the continued existence of conflicting strategic aims among stakeholders in the region suggests that any idea of abandoning the alliances in favor of a multilateral security mechanism is implausible.

It is worth thinking through circumstances under which the United States might be more positively disposed to taking a more active role in Asian regionalism. For instance, if China were to experience a change in its system and become a democracy, would this development remove the perceived need for U.S.-led bilateral alliances and pave the way for cooperative security in Asia? What are the possible regional security implications of a situation in which the United States no longer plays the role of anchor for the global financial system? Another factor that has strengthened the desirability of alliances has been America's own inability to play the role of sole provider of public goods. To the extent that partnerships and regional coalitions can play a role in multilateralizing the provision of international public goods through joint response to monitoring of sea lanes, multilateral provision of disaster relief, and joint responsibility for managing environmental issues such as climate change, these responses may contribute to American interest in Asian regionalism and might pose significant challenges to the continuation of America's Asian alliances in their current form.

Conclusion

This paper has examined how North Korea's nuclear pursuits have served to catalyze ad hoc security multilateralism in Northeast Asia over the course of the past two decades. On the one hand, the magnitude of North Korea's challenge to common regional security interests has brought regional actors together and has served as a focal point for the development of a collective regional response to this challenge. On the other hand, there is no other issue beyond North Korea's nuclear challenge that appears to be sufficiently

compelling to overcome underlying security dilemmas or to drive the institutionalization of regional security cooperation among Northeast Asian countries. Although the North Korean nuclear issue has promoted habits of cooperation that could be regularized if they were to take root sufficiently that such a dialogue were perceived as serving the collective interests of all participants in the region, there is not yet sufficient reason in the view of this author to expect that any other issue will emerge as the basis for regional collective action in Northeast Asia.

Some may argue that the U.S.-led alliance structure itself is a major factor inhibiting the development of such cooperation because any good alliance needs an enemy to be targeted against. It is this idea that has led many Chinese analysts to classify the U.S.-led alliances as a historical relic of the cold war. However, such a view does not take into consideration the idea that the glue holding alliances together might also derive from cooperation that stands for something rather than being focused on a common threat. This emerging rationale for alliance cooperation is double-edged, however, since existing alliances can also be used to hedge against the possibility of an emerging threat. To the extent that such a hedging strategy is still perceived as useful to ensure the security needs of alliance partners, it is much more likely that U.S.-led alliances will continue to develop in tandem with multilateral security cooperation rather than in opposition to such cooperation. To the extent that security multilateralism proves itself to be an effective and constructive contributor to keeping the peace by promoting high levels of mutual trust in Northeast Asia, such a development might make the alliances obsolete. Until then, it is likely that security multilateralism in Northeast Asia will continue to develop on an ad hoc basis in response to specific challenges that require cooperation to successfully manage.

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