

## PREPARING FOR A PEACE PROCESS IN THE KOREAN PENINSULA\*

*Kun Young Park*

*The rollback of North Korea's nuclear program is closely intertwined with the peace process in the Korean peninsula and resuscitation of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). With the recent thaw in U.S.-North Korea relations, a new opportunity is emerging for the two Koreas and the United States. The international community and the concerned parties cannot afford another failure given the imminent danger of the current security situation on the peninsula and the resulting pressing need for peace building. It is time for them to make a serious effort to bring about a Korean peace that would, in turn, contribute to peace, prosperity, and democracy in the region and the rest of the world. This article looks at policy alternatives that will effectively bring solid and lasting peace to the Korean peninsula.*

**Key words:** armistice, peace treaty, U.S.-North Korea relations, economic community, arms control, multilateral security cooperation in Northeast Asia

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### Another Attempt at Peace

The Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) are still technically at war, as their 1950-1953 conflict ended in an armistice rather than a peace treaty. War has been successfully deterred for the past several decades, but the danger even of accidental war on the Korean peninsula is still high because of the number of troops, weapons, and bases in close proximity. North Korea and the United States came close to war in 1994 and again in 2006 over the possibility of the North's developing nuclear weapons.

A nuclear North Korea poses a great threat to the security of the United States in regard to global terrorism, but also will make the U.S. forces in (South) Korea (USFK), U.S. forces in Japan (USFJ), and the countries that host U.S. troops vulnerable to nuclear blackmail. It may trigger a nuclear arms race in Northeast Asia, thereby impairing the various U.S. commercial opportunities in the region and the nonproliferation regime that has been a cornerstone of U.S. security policy for the last several decades. A North Korean bomb might also cause Iran to go nuclear, which would increase the horrifying possibility of nuclear exchanges between it and Israel. Other nations in the Middle East and Europe are likely to develop or beef up their nuclear deterrent capabilities, with unpredictable and frightening regional and global consequences. The threat to the United States will be greatly amplified by the potential development of North Korean ballistic missiles that have the capability to reach major cities in the western United States.<sup>1</sup>

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1. The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency reported in 2001 that the *Taepo Dong-2* may be ready for flight-testing. It suggested that "in a two-stage ballistic missile configuration it could deliver a several-hundred-kg payload up to 10,000 km—sufficient to strike Alaska, Hawaii, and parts of the continental United States. If the North uses a third stage similar to the one used on the *Taepo Dong-1* in 1998 in a ballistic missile configuration, then it could deliver a several-hundred-kg payload up to 15,000 km—sufficient to strike all of North America." National Intelligence

Since the Korean War ended there have been several serious attempts to bring about permanent peace on the Korean peninsula. The most notable ones include the North-South rapprochement in the early 1990s that produced the Basic Agreement between the two Koreas, the four-party talks initiated by Presidents Kim Young Sam and Bill Clinton in 1996, and the high-level talks between the United States and North Korea in 2000, which was the culmination of the "Perry process." The most recent peace effort came at the Six Party Talks (6PT) in the September 2005 Joint Statement and February 2007 action plan. The participants in those talks pledged to "take positive steps to increase mutual trust, and will make joint efforts for lasting peace and stability in Northeast Asia" and that "the directly related parties will negotiate a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula at an appropriate separate forum." However, the latest round of six-party talks (and, therefore, the peace negotiations) ended on December 11, 2008 in stalemate because North Korea refused to agree in writing that verification of its nuclear activities will include scientific sampling and access to undeclared sites.<sup>2</sup>

North Korea appeared to want to cut a deal with the new, liberal U.S. administration of Barack Obama. However, probably because of Kim Jong Il's poor health conditions and other domestic political considerations, the North got off to a bad start with Obama, who offered the kind of dialogue that President George W. Bush took far too long to embrace. In April 2009, the North launched a long-range rocket, quit the 6PT, expelled nuclear monitors, and restarted a plutonium plant. In May, it tested its second nuclear device. The United States responded by mustering international support for United Nations sanctions against

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Estimate of the National Intelligence Council, "Foreign Missile Developments and the Ballistic Missile Threat through 2015," December 2001.

2. The North insisted that "it is only required at this point to carry out the limited verification steps agreed in writing with the United States in October 2008, which did not include sampling provisions." Peter Crail, "Six-Party Talks Stall Over Sampling," *Arms Control Today* (January/February, 2009).

the North, resulting in increased tension in the peninsula.

However, North Korea's attitude suddenly changed after former U.S. President Bill Clinton visited Pyongyang to secure the release of two American journalists held there on charges of illegal entry. Since then, the North has released a South Korean worker held for five months on charges of denouncing communist rule, lifted restrictions on border traffic, and promised to resume South Korean tours to scenic spots in the North. The North released four South Korean fishermen it had held for a month, in another move to reach out to the South after months of bellicosity.

The prospect for new negotiations is not entirely clear, but there is a probability that North Korea will return to the 6PT because the U.S. attitude is firm and it is a sort of "Rice-Hill" institution that benefited it greatly. Once the talks get back on track, a discussion on a peace process in the Korean peninsula can resume. As U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said: "If North Korea is genuinely prepared to completely and verifiably eliminate their nuclear weapons program, the Obama administration will be willing to normalize bilateral relations, replace the peninsula's longstanding armistice agreements with a permanent peace treaty and assist in meeting the energy and other economic needs of the North Korean people."<sup>3</sup>

This latest peace attempt, if realized, is particularly important not only for the peninsula but also for regional and global peace and stability. North Korea has conducted nuclear experiments and the rollback of the North's nuclear program is closely intertwined with the peace process in the peninsula and resuscitation of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). The objective of this article is to suggest policy alternatives that will effectively bring solid and lasting peace to the peninsula.

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3. CNN transcript, "Hillary Clinton Warns, Woos North Korea," February 14, 2009 at [www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/02/13/clinton.asia/index.html?section=cnn\\_latest](http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/02/13/clinton.asia/index.html?section=cnn_latest).

## **Normalization of U.S.-North Korea Relations—A Big Booster for Peace**

### *North Korea's Incentive to Negotiate*

Up front, it needs to be emphasized that the normalization of U.S.-North Korea relations, which is likely to be exchanged for North Korea's dismantlement of its nuclear programs, would constitute a key component of the permanent peace structure on the peninsula. In any peace negotiations, it is imperative that one side should be assured that its security will not be threatened by the other. In a more specific and relevant context, the report to President Clinton of former U.S. defense secretary William Perry in 1999 is very instructive. Perry suggested that "United States policy must deal with the North Korean government as *it is* [italics added], not as the U.S. might wish it to be" and that "the U.S. should initiate negotiations with North Korea based on the concept of *mutually reducing threat* [italics added]." In fact, North Korea has claimed that its security has been threatened by the U.S. North Korea policy, which it has regarded as having hostile intention, while the United States has been worried about North Korea's transfer of nuclear materials and development of nuclear weapons. North Korea has always suggested that its security would be attained only when it normalizes its relations with the United States. Once it feels secure, North Korean spokespersons have said, the country will no longer need a nuclear "deterrent capability."

There is a concern, though, that North Korea will never abandon its nuclear weapons and programs even if the U.S. normalizes relations with it. This concern, however, disregards the fact that North Korea now has "a capability" to make nuclear weapons. If North Korea were required to reconstitute a nuclear-weapons program for any reason it could do so far more quickly than it could several years ago. This means that North Korea has little to lose by removing its nuclear weapons/materials and dismantling its existing nuclear-weapons program in case it believes that the normalization will bring about significant security and

other benefits.

There are a number of other reasons for that prediction.<sup>4</sup> First, the North's economic stress will become a heavy political burden for North Korean leader Kim Jong Il. One can argue that Kim benefits from what can be called a "hostile symbiotic relationship." But it seems quite clear that he knows he can only benefit in the short term. Second, the powerful overture by the Obama administration, including a security guarantee through diplomatic normalization, is more substantive, and therefore, more attractive compared with the proposals by the previous Bush administration. In November 2002, Kim sent Bush a letter saying that "If the United States recognizes our sovereignty and assures non-aggression, it is our view that we should be able to find a way to resolve the nuclear issue in compliance with the demands of a new century." Further, he declared, "If the United States makes a bold decision, we will respond accordingly."<sup>5</sup>

Third, it seems plausible to suggest that Obama's efforts will resonate well in North Korea just as Jimmy Carter's did in 1994. Fourth, North Korea surely knows that Obama will take punitive actions against its recalcitrance if it undermines his "audacious hope" for diplomacy. It will be easy for North Korea to reason that Obama may even overreact for a domestic political reason, given the widespread perception in the United States that Democrats are "soft" on security. Fifth, eight years are long enough for "learning" to take effect. Kim Jong Il might have thought that his interest would have been greatly served if Bill Clinton's visit had come about in 2000. The North Korean leader is not likely to lose the long-awaited opportunity when it comes up.

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4. Kun Young Park, "Predicting the North Korea Policy of the Obama Administration: A Neo-Perry Process in the Offing?" *The East Asia Journal*, No. 58 (Fall, 2009).

5. Donald Gregg and Don Oberdorfer, "A Moment to Seize with North Korea," *Washington Post*, June 22, 2005. The U.S. State Department showed interest in Kim's letter at the time, but the White House received it rather negatively, saying that it would not reward bad behavior.

Seventh, China and Russia will be better positioned to persuade and/or pressure North Korea given the forward-looking features of the U.S. proposal. The Obama administration's effort to forge international cooperation may also turn out to be effective and facilitative. The reasons provided above seem pretty convincing, although more detailed explanations for those reasons, which need a separate space, may be helpful.

#### *U.S. Incentives to Normalize Relations*

The U.S. seems to view the normalization of its relations with North Korea as some kind of expense or compensation.<sup>6</sup> This perception was created in part by the North, which has considered normalization critical evidence that the United States would no longer be hostile toward it and an existential procedure that is absolutely necessary for its survival. The United States could use this perception to its advantage when negotiating with the North. But if it looks at the other side of it, Washington will find that the normalization will bring it great advantages in various dimensions. For example, it can cause an ideational change in North Korea. As long as the North harbors an *intention* to build nuclear weapons, fully guaranteeing that the North will continue to be non-nuclear is not possible because it has a capability to build the bomb. It is, therefore, essential for the United States to have North Korea abandon that intention voluntarily.

It should be noted that the normalization of relations will greatly alleviate North Korea's threat perception. That is likely to lead to expanded commercial and cultural exchanges, inevitably creating the prospect of tremendous ideational exchanges between North Korea and the West. It is not difficult to predict where exchanges of ideas between socialism/*juche*/*songun* (military-first) politics and market democracy will lead North Korea in the

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6. Kun Young Park, "A Strategic-Pragmatic Approach to North Korea: Policy Recommendations for Resolution of North Korean Nuclear Disputes," paper for The Brookings Institution, January 2004.

post-cold war period. A pragmatic, open, secure North Korea integrated with the international society will find that its efforts to possess nuclear weapons will harm its fundamental interest. That China became far more pragmatic and open after Sino-U.S. normalization of relations is quite suggestive regarding the future of post-normalization North Korea.

The normalization of relations will bring about another advantage for the United States on the strategic front. As is well known, outside verification of possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), especially uranium-related, is difficult mainly because such programs are clandestine.<sup>7</sup> The more foreigners travel and stay in North Korea, the more opportunities arise for thorough inspection and verification on secret programs of dangerous and illicit weapons. One cannot imagine such open and internationally integrated societies as South Korea or Japan possessing "secret" programs of WMD.

Skeptics express their concern that the normalization will "prop up" North Korea's economy and have a negative boomerang effect. They believe that an economically and militarily stronger North Korea will become emboldened to attack South Korea and U.S. interests overseas. But this may be true only if North Korea has nuclear weapons. A war initiated by the denuclearized North would be an act of suicide and Kim Jong Il understands this. He knows that his military adventurism will definitely be opposed by both Russia and China<sup>8</sup> and instantly defeated by the mighty firepower of the forces of the United States and South Korea. Kim has no reason to become militarily adventurous

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7. Charles J. Pritchard, "Crossroads for North Korea Talks: An Interview with Charles L. 'Jack' Pritchard," Country Resources, Arms Control Association, November 2003.

8. Xu Caihou, member of the secretariat of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee and director of the General Political Department of the People's Liberation Army, was quoted as debriefing Hu Jintao that Kim Jong Il pointed out that "the situation now is different from the 1950s" when China supported the North's war effort during "the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea." Zong Hairen, "Hu Jintao Writes to Kim Jong-il to Open Door to Six-Party Talks," *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, August 28, 2003.

once having been stripped of nuclear weapons. He would then be seriously risking his status as the most powerful and revered in North Korea.

Washington has been quite interested in changing the North's behavior on human rights. The United States and others have criticized the North for its violations of the fundamental rights of the people. However, a question arises as to the method. Can criticizing solve the problem? The United States and the international community should be reminded, for example, that their efforts to promote human rights in South Korea and China were much more successful when a civil society evolved in the former and an American embassy was established in the latter.

### **Replacing the Armistice Agreement with a Peace Treaty**

Another element facilitating the peace process in the peninsula is the replacement of the armistice with a peace treaty. The former is an agreement with the purpose of ceasing the military hostilities whereas the latter is a political agreement with the objective of terminating a war, which is one of the ways to construct a permanent peace regime on the peninsula. Preparing for the peace treaty, there are some issues on which the directly concerned parties need to work together. The first is the timeline. Assuming that the Six Party Talks resume, it would be reasonable for the parties to start the negotiation after North Korea has provided "a complete declaration of all nuclear programs and disablement of all existing nuclear facilities" that will be exchanged for "economic, energy and humanitarian assistance up to the equivalent of 950,000 tons of heavy fuel oil" to North Korea. That is because the participants in the 6PT must concentrate on resolving the nuclear issue. But it seems unreasonable to postpone negotiation on the peace process until North Korea has dismantled its nuclear programs because it would not only disregard North Korea's vital interest but also have a potential to derail the nuclear negotiation process itself given that two issues are organically intertwined with each other.

The reasonable timing of the conclusion of the peace treaty would be when the United States recognizes North Korea and the latter dismantles its nuclear program. It is desirable that these three important events occur at the same time. However, it will not be a problem if the peace treaty comes later given that there are other hard issues, including the Northern Limit Line (NLL) dispute, that may make the treaty difficult to conclude. The concerned parties need to understand that the normalization of relations between the United States and North Korea constitutes the crux of the peace treaty (i.e., the issues of the security guarantee and the role of U.S. forces in Korea) and that there are many cases where nations that had fought each other have established diplomatic relations prior to concluding a peace treaty. A *modus vivendi* declaring the will for peace may be useful in the interim.

As for the question of determining the participants in the peace forum, there have been a number of suggestions. However, the most sensible format is the four-party talks, including the two Koreas, the United States, and China—the countries that had directly engaged in the Korean War. There is a precedent. The U.S.-DPRK joint communique of 2000, “enshrined” in the North, states that “the two sides agreed there are a variety of available means, including Four Party talks, to reduce tension on the Korean Peninsula and formally end the Korean War by replacing the 1953 Armistice Agreement with permanent peace arrangements.” The issue whether South Korea belongs at the talks is effectively settled by the North-South joint declaration of October 4, 2007.

Concerning the more specific question of who gets to sign which treaty, there are a couple of alternatives: the “two-plus-two” and the “four-party peace treaty” methods. I believe that the treaty simultaneously signed by the two Koreas, the United States, and China makes more sense in that all the parties were directly involved in the Korean War and that North Korea feels threatened by the United States and vice versa. The method of “two-plus-two,” where the United States and China “endorse” the peace treaty between the two Koreas, does not adequately address the mutual threat perception held by the United States

and North Korea. Moreover, “two-plus-two,” where the United States and China “guarantee” compliance with the treaty by the two Koreas, may lead to an unrealistic situation where a guarantor (China) must punish its military ally (North Korea) in case the latter violates the treaty.

Concerning the content of the peace treaty, the relevant chapters in the 1991 North-South Basic Agreement can be a guiding light. By signing the Basic Agreement, the two Koreas committed themselves to nonaggression, the inviolability of the Military Demarcation Line (MDL), and the staged mutual reduction of their military forces. The Basic Agreement now no longer seems binding for political and other reasons. Nevertheless, the rationality and the relevance of the document remain unchallenged.

### **The Peace Enhancers and Peace Ratchets**

The peace treaty has a tremendous political and symbolic meaning for the signatories and the rest of the world. However, a document alone cannot guarantee solid and lasting peace. Measures that ensure the compliance of the signatories to the treaty should be established. Especially, in case the treaty comes slowly, as mentioned above, mechanisms facilitating the peace process are necessary. The normalization of relations between the United States and North Korea is one important mechanism that helps guarantee the compliance of the treaty. Other mechanisms have economic, military, and strategic components. These include the expansion of inter-Korean economic cooperation, which could lead to the formation of a “North-South economic community,” arms control on the peninsula, and institutionalization of multilateral security cooperation in Northeast Asia. These measures are particularly important in that they not only facilitate and/or strengthen the peace dynamics but also make the process forward-looking—in other words, “unification-bound.”

### *Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation*

As for economic cooperation, the immediate task for the two Koreas would be the expansion of the Kaesong Industrial Complex, the Kumkang Mountain Project, and the rapid completion of the reconnection of the cross-border railroads and roads cut since the Korean War. With the revitalization of such projects, the two Koreas could work together on larger projects such as a large-scale investment in infrastructure and natural resources in North Korea.

It is crucial for the Koreas to go down this road based on “the two-track approach,” the core intent of which is to prevent political problems from hindering economic cooperation to the extent possible. Expansion of inter-Korean economic cooperation is likely to contribute to the deepening of interdependence between them which, in turn, would give significant leverage to South Korea when negotiating with North Korea on permanent peace on the peninsula. It would also produce a so-called “ratchet effect” in the sense that the peace process cannot go backward once the interdependence crosses a threshold.<sup>9</sup>

### *Arms Control*

A military measure that undergirds the peace structure or pushes the peace process forward is arms control on the peninsula, which could significantly reduce or remove military capabilities to provoke a war. In 1990 the two Koreas exchanged their perspectives and positions on arms control at prime minis-

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9. British economists Alan Peacock and Jack Wiseman provide an explanation as to why government spending as a percent of GNP grows. They suggest that “If a war, say, raises expenditures, expenditures after the war will not fall all the way back to their prewar level. Thus the name ‘ratchet effect.’” The ratchet effect here means that some processes cannot go backward once certain things have happened, by analogy with the mechanical ratchet that holds the spring tight as a clock is wound up. Alan T. Peacock and Jack Wiseman (assisted by Jindrich Veverka), *The Growth of Public Expenditure in the United Kingdom* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961).

ter-level talks. These could be a basis from which the arms control negotiations can start.

Conventional wisdom concerning the sequence of arms control suggests that political confidence-building measures (CBMs) leads to military CBMs that, in turn, lead to arms reductions. This has an element of logical integrity; but it also seems plausible to argue that one step does not have to be a precondition for another. For example, many arms control agreements signed by the United States and the Soviet Union (USSR) during the cold-war period such as the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaties (SALT), Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM), and Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) were based not on mutual political confidence but on mutual confidence in the viability and reliability of the verification procedures using National Technical Means.<sup>10</sup> The arms control process on the peninsula needs to be agreed to and implemented with great flexibility.

Most recently, South Korea made a move in favor of arms control on the peninsula. On August 15, 2009, South Korea's president called on North Korea to reach a deal to cut conventional arms amassed on their heavily fortified border. He suggested that "If the North and South reduce conventional weapons and troops, enormous resources will be freed up to improve the economies on both sides."<sup>11</sup> His initiative probably reflects current economic problems South Korea faces, but it could be an important step forward for promoting the peace process on the peninsula.

One should be aware that the two Koreas' efforts for arms control and peace building may not succeed if the forces of the military-industrial complex and the entrenched interests it represents are not adequately contained. One example often taken in this regard is the missile defense system the United States has

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10. National technical means of verification is a phrase that first appeared in the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty between the United States and USSR. The term covers a variety of monitoring technologies, including satellites.

11. President Lee Myung-bak, a speech during the 64th anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japan's colonial rule, Seoul, August 15, 2009.

been constructing in Northeast Asia and throughout the world. Many scholars and experts in the United States and elsewhere have said that the motivations behind the U.S. missile defense project are political, psychological, and commercial-business components. Some suggest that it is like a “religion” for some American conservatives.<sup>12</sup> If this is true, the peace process, which would effectively remove the danger posed by North Korea’s nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles, collides with the interest of the missile defense advocates. Of course, whether this becomes a reality will, to a great extent, depend on whether the political leadership in the United States changes its view on the missile defense system.

In more general terms, it should be noted that President Obama may find it difficult to contain the military-industrial complex. The president needs supporters to stay in power. He knows that he will get more supporters if they have more money in their pockets. Defense contractors have enormous impact on the economy in terms of employment. They also have depression-fighting capabilities.<sup>13</sup> Obama cannot easily take measures that are in conflict with the interest of these companies.

Recently, President Obama chastised the defense industry and a free-spending Congress for wasting tax dollars “with doctrine and weapons better suited to fight the Soviets on the plains of Europe than insurgents in the rugged terrain of Afghanistan.”

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12. Interview with Wendy Sherman, October 25, 2001, The Albright Group, Washington, D.C. Sherman said: “For some people in the current Administration it is a religion. It is theology. It is a belief that the United States will not be safe until there is a missile defense system, that the ultimate weapon against the rogue state is a missile defense system because if those countries that have nuclear weapons and the potential for ballistic missiles to deliver those weapons knew that, the weapons would be ineffective. It would pull the rug out from under those countries and they would no longer have the motivation for continuing to build that capability.”

13. Baran and Sweezy long ago argued that by raising the level of defense spending a country could solve the problems of under-consumption and the unemployment associated with it. Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital* (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1968).

He took on “the entrenched lobbyists pushing weapons that even our military says it doesn’t want” and blistered lawmakers in Washington whose impulse he said was “to protect jobs back home building things we don’t need [at] a cost that we can’t afford.”<sup>14</sup> However, Obama’s opposition was offered from a budgetary perspective with an intention to promote the U.S. domestic economy rather than from an arms-control perspective that may suggest that U.S. restraint on arms exports would contribute to regional and global peace.

South Korea is one of the biggest foreign markets for U.S. conventional weapons. According to the *SIPRI Yearbook 2009*, it ranked third in the world during 2004-2008 in terms of importing conventional weapons, with a 6-percent share of global arms imports. It also indicates that 73 percent of the South Korean imports came from the United States and that 15 percent of total U.S. weapons sales went to South Korea (followed by Israel at 13 percent and the United Arab Emirates at 11 percent).<sup>15</sup> Obama’s vision for peace may conflict with his domestic political interests.

Furthermore, the influence of the U.S. military-industrial complex has been sustained by “the revolving-door system,” which remains alive and well. The development of this system has intensified the mutually supportive networks existing between members of the military establishment, Congress, and private weapons industry.<sup>16</sup> The peace process in the Korean peninsula is a complex and complicated one. The military-industrial complex of the United States has a significant role to play in that process.

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14. Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention,” Phoenix Convention Center, Phoenix, Arizona, August 17, 2009, at [www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-the-veterans-of-foreign-wars-convention/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-the-veterans-of-foreign-wars-convention/).

15. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 2009: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 15.

16. Jerel A. Rosati and James M. Scott, *The Politics of United States Foreign Policy*, 4th ed. (New York: Wadsworth, 2006), p. 462.

*U.S. Forces in Korea*

The negotiation of arms control on the peninsula is likely to include the issue of the U.S. forces in Korea. There is no doubt that the right of the United States to station forces in and around the ROK derives from their bilateral defense pact, and therefore that the issue is entirely one between allies. However, the issue will be inevitably raised at the peace forum. One reason is that the 1953 Armistice Agreement (Article IV, no. 60) states that "in order to insure the peaceful settlement of the Korean question, a political conference was to be held within three months after the Agreement is signed to settle the questions of the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Korea." Another reason is the fact that the U.S. forces, with their tremendous war-fighting capability focused on deterring North Korea's military adventurism, has been a key factor affecting the balance of power equation on the peninsula. The two allies could agree to discuss this issue when the negotiations on nuclear problems and the peace process make significant progress.

One thing quite certain is that North Korea and probably China will not press for the withdrawal of the U.S. military.<sup>17</sup> They seem to understand that a U.S. withdrawal would probably lead either to the strengthening of the U.S.-Japan alliance or to the emergence of a "belligerent" Japan, both of which will definitely collide with Chinese and North Korean security interests.<sup>18</sup> North Korea has expressed such an understanding several times since the 1992 meeting between U.S. Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs Arnold Kanter and North Korean Worker's Party Sec-

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17. A more detailed analysis is provided by Kun Young Park, *The International Politics of the Korean Peninsula* (Seoul: Oruem, 1999); Kun Young Park, "A New U.S.-ROK Alliance: A Nine-Point Recommendation for a Reflective and Mature Partnership," in *Challenges Posed by the DPRK for the Alliance and the Region* (Washington, D.C.: Korea Economic Institute, 2005).

18. Thomas F. Christensen, "China, the U.S.-Japan Alliance, and the Security Dilemma in East Asia," *International Security*, vol. 23, No. 4 (Spring, 1999), pp. 49-80; Thomas F. Christensen, "Chinese Realpolitik," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 75, No. 5 (September-October, 1996), pp. 37-52.

retary for International Affairs Kim Yong-soon. The two communist sides may, instead, request a reduction and a change in the role of the U.S. forces in South Korea.

The size and the structure of the U.S. forces will be adjusted and changed according to the U.S. national security strategy. But the United States needs to consult and work closely with South Korea in a way that can simultaneously contribute to U.S. security and arms control on the peninsula.

Perhaps the more important question concerns the future role of the U.S. forces. North Korea and some in South Korea have suggested that the U.S. role change to a kind of peacekeeping force, which means in effect that the United States would no longer be the alliance partner of South Korea. This is hardly a viable option for the foreseeable future for South Korea and the United States. The bilateral defense pact stipulates that South Korea and the United States are military allies who “would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.” This relationship might be put in serious jeopardy by a change in the status of U.S. forces. It would probably create severe political turbulence in South Korea as well. A reasonable alternative would be a reinterpretation of the role of the U.S. forces in South Korea by the two allies. For example, the “ROK-U.S. joint declaration of security and cooperation” could allow the two nations to harmoniously pursue the two tracks of the alliance and the peace process on the peninsula.

The change in the role of the U.S. forces, coupled with their reduction and the planned transfer of U.S. operational control (OPCON) over part of South Korea’s armed forces, is expected to reduce the threat perception held by North Korea, and therefore, promote the peace process. In order to further reduce North Korea’s threat perception, South Korea and the United States may want to work together to make sure that the “strategically flexible” U.S. forces would not cause security concerns in North Korea or any other nation in East Asia. One reason I relate the peace process to the strategic flexibility of the U.S. forces concerns the possibility of war on the peninsula caused by a North Korean misperception that derives from the belief that it

is about to be attacked by the United States in a preemptive war.<sup>19</sup> The Obama administration is not likely to emphasize this aspect of the U.S. security policy. However, this option has never been off the table throughout the post-Korean War history. More importantly, North Korea's perception is not always clear-headed about the realities in the United States. The probability of misperception is likely to increase if the U.S. forces become strategically flexible because, to North Korea's way of thinking, it may mean a transformation of strictly defensive forces into more flexible and "offensive" ones.

### *Multilateral Security Cooperation*

Arms control constitutes a core of the peace process on the Korean peninsula; but in order for it to get off the ground and move forward, it needs to be supported by a number of facilitative mechanisms. One of them is institutionalized multilateral security cooperation in Northeast Asia. As we have witnessed over the past several years, the security dynamics in the region have been dangerously driven in major part by the seemingly inextricable conflict between notions of "the China threat" and "the normal nation (or value diplomacy)" of Japan. For example, the U.S. announcement that it was "willing to negotiate with Japan concerning the sale of F-22s"<sup>20</sup> touched off worries about an escalating

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19. Peter Hayes, "Seven Step Policy to Solve the North Korean Nuclear Problem," DPRK Briefing Book, Nautilus Institute, November 18, 2003, at [www.nautilus.org/DPRKbriefingbook/multilateralTalks/PHsevensteps.html](http://www.nautilus.org/DPRKbriefingbook/multilateralTalks/PHsevensteps.html).

20. Dennis Wilder, then senior director for East Asian Affairs on the U.S. National Security Council, confirmed a future deal one day before Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo visited the United States in April 2007. In response to a reporter's question, Wilder said: "In terms of future fighters for Japan, obviously, the Japanese air force has requirements. China is modernizing, at a rapid pace, its air force. The Japanese obviously feel some threat in relation to North Korea and its development of missile and nuclear capabilities. And so we are very positively disposed to talking to the Japanese about future-generation fighter aircraft." David Isenberg, "Japan Fired Up over US Fighter," *Asia Times*, May 5, 2007.

arms race in the area. It has been reported that China has already started developing *Jian-14* aircraft with radar-dodging capability. The intensifying arms buildup in China and Japan is most likely to wreak havoc on the arms control effort on the Korean peninsula because it will be simply unsustainable for domestic political and security reasons. This is why the peace process on the peninsula is organically related to security cooperation in Northeast Asia. In reverse and in addition, the peace and stability enhanced by such multilateral security efforts will have positive ramifications for peace, prosperity, democracy in the peninsula and beyond.

It should be noted here that the relationship between the ROK-U.S. alliance and multilateral security cooperation must not be approached from a zero-sum perspective. As implied above, the creation of a regional security system based on the concept of common or cooperative security, which would mean abolishing the military alliance, is not likely to receive strong support from the United States or South Korea given the increasing probability of clashes between expansionist forces in the area and mistrust among the regional powers. Therefore, a viable alternative would involve the coexistence of the alliance system with a multilateral security institution.<sup>21</sup>

More specifically, the ROK-U.S. alliance, with the possibility of an expanded role, should be adapted to operate in close collaboration with a multilateral security regime in seeking to prevent crises and maintain peace and stability in Northeast Asia. This is entirely possible as the new U.S. political leadership is expected to become more prudent and pragmatic in making and implementing its foreign and security policy.

There are many roadblocks that complicate the institutionalization of multilateral security cooperation in Northeast Asia. His-

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21. The Clinton administration was interested in what it called "overlapping plates of armor" that comprise both the alliances and security cooperation mechanism. U.S. Department of Defense, *United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region* (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1995); Warren Christopher, "America's Leadership, America's Opportunity," *Foreign Policy*, No. 98 (Spring, 1995), pp. 6-28. See Park, "A New U.S.-ROK Alliance," for more details.

torical enmities, a lack of experience in multilateral coordination, and nationalist cultures are often cited as problems obstructing the cooperation.<sup>22</sup> Paradoxically, however, the more prevalent the obstacles, the more there would be a need collectively to remove them. As the severe tension between the West and the East, exacerbated by nuclear and conventional arms races in Europe, helped invent the notion of common/cooperative security and started the Helsinki process, the increased possibility of serious conflict among major powers in the region may promote the need for an effective regional security regime.

That being said, one cannot disregard the facilitating factors that have recently emerged. One of them is the generational change in the Chinese military. The younger officers of the People's Liberation Army are "better educated and trained, spent time abroad, speak foreign languages, and do not evince the insular tendencies" of their seniors, who "have been socialized in a military institution and political culture that prizes discipline and secrecy, and thus do not appreciate the importance of defense transparency as a security-enhancing measure."<sup>23</sup> Another encouraging sign from China is that the number of "articles dealing with the subject of arms control/common security drastically increased from twenty-six to eighty-seven between the 1980s and 1990s."<sup>24</sup>

President Obama's interest in multilateral security cooperation in Asia is another facilitating factor. According to the Obama-Biden Plan published during their campaign, the United States "will forge a more effective framework in Asia that goes beyond bilateral agreements, occasional summits, and ad hoc arrangements, such as the six-party talks on North Korea." What Obama has in mind is obviously the coexistence of the alliances and the

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22. For more details, see Koo Kab-Woo, Park Kun Young and Choi Young-jong, "Promoting Peace on the Korean Peninsula and Multilateral Security Cooperation in East Asia" (in Korean), *Korea and World Politics*, vol. 21, No. 2 (Summer, 2005), pp. 31-64.

23. David Shambaugh, "China's Military Views the World: Ambivalent Security," *International Security*, vol. 24, No. 3 (Winter, 1999-2000), p. 56.

24. Cha Chang Hoon, "Second Image Reversed: Norm's Impacts on China's Arms Control and Disarmament Policy" (in Korean), *International Politics Journal*, vol. 42, No. 4 (2004), pp. 347-72.

security cooperation mechanism, for as he says, the United States “will maintain strong ties with allies like Japan, South Korea and Australia.”<sup>25</sup>

South Korea and the United States should and are likely to take the initiative to galvanize multilateral security cooperation, promoting collaboration within the existing alliance system in a way that prevents crises and maintains stability in the region. The peace process on the peninsula will greatly benefit from it. The 6PT can be a useful beginning that could develop into a more comprehensive security community in Northeast Asia. As the February 13 action plan states, “once the initial actions are implemented, the Six Parties will promptly hold a ministerial meeting to confirm implementation of the Joint Statement and explore ways and means for promoting security cooperation in Northeast Asia.”

The agenda for the Northeast Asian security regime should include a broad spectrum of issues in both the military and non-military areas, such as the economy, science and technology, environment, human rights, culture, refugees, and narcotics. In the military area, an attempt must be made to establish the habit of dialogue and consultation and create common rules for all members. Also, a common commitment must be made to the non-use of military force, nonaggression, and the non-use of nuclear weapons within the region.<sup>26</sup>

These initial measures ought to be followed by the active participation of the member states in military confidence building in the region—such as (in the words of Kim Dae Jung) “the publication of the defense budget, the exchange of military personnel, pre-notification of military exercises, the exchange of military data and information, the invitation to and dispatch of military observers to military exercises, and the publication of military strategies and doctrines.” As security cooperation matures into a firm pattern of institutionalization, a reduction and/or

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25. The Obama-Biden Plan, at [http://change.gov/agenda/foreign\\_policy\\_agenda/](http://change.gov/agenda/foreign_policy_agenda/).

26. Kim Dae-jung, *The Three-Stage Approach to Korean Unification* (Seoul: 1995), p. 110.

freeze ought to occur with respect to weapons of mass destruction and important conventional weapons.<sup>27</sup>

As progress in Northeast Asian security cooperation is made, there may emerge a need for it to be connected with a European counterpart. Both institutions and the participating nations will benefit greatly by sharing information, knowhow, and historical lessons, and also by collaborating on global security issues. Zbigniew Brzezinski proposed a similar idea a decade earlier when he said that security cooperation in Northeast Asia could “lead to a dialogue with the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) and that, in turn, could eventually pave the way for a series of conferences by European and Asian states on security issues.” He suggested that “a transcontinental security system would thus begin to take shape.”<sup>28</sup>

Brzezinski’s proposal for a transcontinental security system was intended to “gradually relieve America of some of its burdens, while perpetuating beyond a generation its decisive role as Eurasia’s arbitrator, and ultimately, to preserve America’s role as the first and only global superpower.” However, the wisdom that the two multilateral security regimes can produce a synergy effect by working together is worth serious consideration by South Korea and the nations participating in the Northeast Asian security regime.

### Conclusion

Korea’s history is chock-full of foreign domination and enormous forced suffering. For example, the United States nullified the Chemulpo Treaty, the “first treaty” between the two nations, by the Taft-Katsura Agreement of July 29, 1904 and gave Japan a free hand in Korea. After securing U.S. consent, Japan moved fast and made Korea a Japanese protectorate. Unaware of the secret

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27. Ibid.

28. Zbigniew Brzezinski, “A Geostrategy for Eurasia,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 76, No. 5 (September-October, 1997), pp. 50-64.

agreement, King Kojong sent Homer Hulbert, an American adviser to the Korean court, to Washington to seek U.S. aid under the Chemulpo Treaty. President Theodore Roosevelt refused to see Hulbert. When Japan retreated from Korea at the end of the Pacific War in 1945, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to the division of the Korean peninsula. The divided Korea fell into a civil war that escalated into a major conflict involving the United States, China, and other powers. Since then, the Korean peninsula has been an arena where cold-war rivals dangerously confronted each other. It is still “a solitary island of the cold war” with tensions and a great potential for instability.

This is not to blame any nation. But one cannot deny that the war and the division of the peninsula caused the northern part of Korea to suffer from poverty, lack of freedom and human rights, and existential anxieties. The southern part bears the burden of high military expenditures and perennial security threats that, in turn, tend to undermine democratic processes there. The international community, including the United States, is also faced with big problems that derive from recalcitrant North Korea. Thus a peace process is urgent.

On April 13, 2009 the United Nations Security Council condemned the April 5, 2009 “launch” by the DPRK.<sup>29</sup> North Korea “resolutely condemned” the UN action the next day, claiming that it “rampantly infringes upon the country’s sovereignty and severely debases the people’s dignity.” Pyongyang flatly stated that “We have no choice but to further strengthen our nuclear deterrent to cope with additional military threats by hostile forces,” and that “there is no need for the six-party talks anymore” and that it “will never, ever again take part in such talks and will be bound by any agreement reached at the talks.” Four years earlier, the North stated, after Secretary Condoleezza Rice labeled North Korea one of the “outposts of tyranny,” that “We have wanted the six-party talks but we are compelled to suspend

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29. Statement by the President of the Security Council, the United Nations; online at <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/301/03/PDF/N0930103.pdf?OpenElement>.

our participation in the talks for an indefinite period till we have recognized that there is justification for us to attend the talks and there are ample conditions and atmosphere to expect positive results from the talks.”<sup>30</sup> The North came back to the negotiating table in July 2005 because it believed that the “U.S. side clarified its official stand to recognize [North Korea] as a sovereign state, not to invade it and hold bilateral talks within the framework of the six-party talks.”<sup>31</sup>

With the recent thaw in the relations, it seems that a new opportunity is emerging for the two Koreas and the United States. The international community and the concerned parties cannot afford another failure given the imminent danger of the current security situation on the peninsula and the resulting pressing need for peace building. It is time for them to make a serious effort to bring about a Korean peace that would, in turn, contribute to peace, prosperity, and democracy in the region and the rest of the world as well.

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