

Inter-Korean Strategic Relations and Security Forum in Northeast Asia

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ABSTRACT

As an era of the Bush's controversial foreign policy and security responses to the post-9.11 war on terrorism is drawing to a close, the DPRK nuclear issue is flaring up once again. The stalemate is setting in on both fronts of inter-Korean relations, with the launching of the new Lee Myung-Bak Administration in the South, and on the Six-Party Talks process of the DPRK nuclear disablement. The paper addresses the Bush Administration policy shift away from the hardline posture toward a more pragmatic and diplomatic direction in the twilight of the second term in office, asymmetry of power and stalemate in inter-Korean relations, following vicious anti-Lee Myung-Bak rhetoric of the DPRK, with concerns over the North's economic stagnation and failed relations with the South. The notion of peace-building on the Korean Peninsula, as an imagined task for Korea's future, is treated as premature. The security forum based on the "process-oriented" approach to Korean peace seems better suited as an instrument for the DPRK nuclear dismantlement. The paper closes with few speculations on the future prospects and problems of bringing about an ultimate aim of a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula with security and peace that requires restoring the viability of the NPT regime and the DPRK reversal on its withdrawal stance.

KEY WORDS: Strategic Shift, Asymmetry of Power, Stalemate in Inter-Korean Relations, Building Peace Regime, Activating Security Forum, Nuclear Disablement, Six-Party Talks, Nuclear Disarmament, and NPT.

“Regimes in Contest” epitomizes the reality of Korean security across the DMZ (De-militarized Zone) that bisects the peninsula into two. Inter-Korean relations between the North and the South are hopelessly stalemated in 2008, approximating the by-gone era of the cold-war years.

Pyeongyang is not happy over the recent political changes in South Korea because, under the new Lee Myung-bak Administration (2008-2013), Seoul has made it known that its North Korea policy will become more “conservative and realistic.” The South Korean government will henceforth pursue a new strategy for “transparency,” “mutual benefits,” and “pragmatism” in dealing with the DPRK. Since approximately 2005 South Koreans began to realize that their outreach and economic assistance to North Korea were not paying enough dividends. An earlier strategy of “one-side giving and the other-side receiving”— with no reciprocity — was to be discontinued.

A decade-long era of the “liberal and progressive” dominance in South Korean politics had come to an end, characterized by the strategy of engagement of Stalinist North Korea with the “Sunshine” policy of the Kim Dae-jung Administration (1988-2003) and the “Peace and Prosperity” policy of the Roh Moo-hyun Administration (2003-2008). Coercive diplomacy toward the North, with a mixture of both carrot-and-stick as initially intended, has not been successful in keeping the Kim Jong-il regime from “going nuclear,” by acquiring WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction) capability and becoming a “nuclear” weapons state. The critics have rightly characterized the ROK’s engagement policy as tantamount to a policy of appeasement.

This article on “Inter-Korean Strategic Relations and Security Forum in Northeast Asia” will proceed in several steps; first, examining the changing security environment and strategic shift of the Bush Administration; second, addressing a widening gap of power, and stalemate, in inter-Korean relations today; third, clarifying the notion of “building a Peace Regime” or Security Forum on the Korean Peninsula; and, finally, addressing the future problems and prospects for Korean peace and security.

Changing Security Environment and Strategic Shift

Since the outbreak of the Korean War (1950-53), South Korea has largely been dependent upon the United States for sustaining its national security. Only in the decades after the Cold War’s ending in 1989 has there been a “strategic shift” in the defense policy orientation and capability of Korea’s Sixth Republic governments, with the South Korean forces taking an increasingly larger role in defending the peninsula. Seoul’s defensive posture has been aimed primarily at North

Korea, since Pyongyang has pursued an ambitious program of nuclear development since 1989.

More recently, Seoul has focused on threats emanating from neighbors other than North Korea, particularly Japan, with which South Korea has had competing territorial claims on islands in the East Sea/Sea of Japan.¹ The latest episode of the controversy over the Japanese claim to South Korea's Dokdo Island in the East Sea, which Japan calls Takeshima, almost derailed U.S. President George W. Bush's scheduled state visit to Korea, August 5-6.

On July 31 the United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN), under the U.S. Geological Survey, issued a corrected entry for Dokdo on its database from "undesignated sovereignty" to "South Korea," thereby ending a weeklong uproar in Korea. The BGN restored the description at around 5:30 p.m. under both the "country" and "first-order administrative division" categories, putting an end to anger over the new designation that had stirred South Korea since the news had broken July 25.²

This dramatic reversal resulted from a special interview that President Bush had given to several Asian reporters at the White House when he said he was well aware of the issue. "I asked (Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice) to review it, and the database will be restored where it was seven days ago," he said. Bush also added that the issue should be resolved peacefully between Korea and Japan and promised the U.S. State Department would handle it well.

Bush also elaborated on the issue, showing maps describing Korea, Japan, Ulleung Island and Dokdo. The interview came at the request of Asian newspapers including the *Chosun Ilbo*, China's *People's Daily*, Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* and Thailand's *Bangkok Post*.³ President Bush was slated to stop in Thailand after South Korea, prior to his scheduled attendance at the opening ceremony of the Beijing Summer Olympics on August 8.

Avoiding the ROK-U.S. Crisis of Confidence

A large-scale anti-American rally was planned during Bush's state visit that would resume the anti-U.S. beef import protests and also protest U.S. complicity with Japan on the territorial issue over Dokdo's sovereignty. Korea had just gone through a series of two-month-long anti-U.S. beef import candle-light vigils on possible Mad Cow disease. What was most surprising was that pro-U.S. Bush's welcoming rally as well as an anti-U.S. Bush rally by the leftists was waged in downtown Seoul on the eve of the Bush-Lee summit in the Blue House.⁴

This episode seemed to underscore the fact that U.S. policy toward Asia has gone through constant strategic shifts and changes over the years. The Bush Administration policy toward the nuclear standoff with North Korea has also gone through changes between the first term (2001-2005) and the second term (2005-2009) in the Bush administration, from initially calling Kim Jong-il's North Korea "a charter member of the axis of evil" to the July 2008 announcement of Bush's decision to lift economic sanctions on North Korea and removing the DPRK from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. This was timed with the on-going Six-Party Talks on North Korea's disablement of its plutonium reactor facilities at Yongbyon.

Since the mid-1990s, the North Korean nuclear crisis has led to the beginning of a post-Cold War divergence between Seoul and Washington, as regards the strategic visions and the near-term security policies vis-à-vis North Korea. Whereas the United States has shifted its security attention in the wake of the 9/11 terrorism attack to global stability and counter-proliferation, considering the DPRK's acquisition of WMDs as "real and potential threats," South Korea's national interests have largely remained centered on maintaining the peace and stability of the peninsula by promoting an engagement of the Kim Jong-il regime of the North in the process of inter-Korea dialogue and reconciliation.

Then, in its second term in office the Bush administration shifted its policy focus away from the hardline posture toward a more pragmatic and diplomatic direction. White House officials were quoted as saying that diplomatic advances by the Bush administration in 2008 were "no accident and represent no change of heart." "It's common but unsubstantiated claim is that this has been a go-it-alone policy in the first term that has all of a sudden seen a shift." An NSC official was quoted as saying "the administration worked with more than 100 nations on the war on terrorism and other issues and that progress with Iraq, Iran and North Korea are all "the diplomatic strategy coming to fruition."⁵

From his NATO policy to the Six-Party Talks on North Korea, George W. Bush has become "a practitioner of nurturing international alliances, much like his father was in the years after the fall of the Berlin Wall." Bush's even sent emissaries to participate in meetings with North Korea and Iran, two-thirds of the "axis of evil" he had labeled in his first State of the Union address more than seven years earlier. When Bush set foot in South Korea on August 5, "he became" the most-traversed U.S. president, surpassing Bill Clinton's record of 133 foreign visits," White House data showed.⁶

George W. Bush's "New American Realism?"

Some of servers termed this change of direction and “strategic shift” in U.S. foreign policy, a “new American realism.” There have been considerable reactions to what the United States, since the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center by the Al Qaeda forces led by Bin Laden, not to be overlapped with the notion of “U.S. primacy.”⁷

Bush came into office with his lofty goals of spreading democracy, which sounded more like an expression of Wilsonian idealism. Although Bush hasn’t wavered on those goals since going to war in Afghanistan and Iraq, he has during his second term in office been more willing to negotiate, work with allies, and cede authority to international alliances.

Some of Bush’s new policy initiatives on Europe and the Middle-East, for instance, have included: “A new era of trans-Atlantic unity” in 2005, after the icy relations during his first term, particularly with France and Germany, and a decision in 2007 to bring representatives of more than 40 nations to Annapolis, Maryland, to bless the start of peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The latter subsequently turned out to be inconclusive and not achievable before Bush’s term in office ended in January 2009.

Also included on the list of conflict zones subject to review were Bush’s endorsing multilateral efforts that prompted North Korea in June 2008 to shed light on its nuclear program and to demolish the cooling tower at its Yongbyon nuclear reactor; Bush’s working with Great Britain, France and Germany to get Iran to stop enriching uranium, by urging Iran to accept incentives; and Bush’s agreeing to support a 50% reduction in worldwide greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 – a non-binding effort but a step beyond his unilateral refusal to sign the Kyoto Protocol which was backed by 142 nations. These and other important policy shifts took place in 2008 by the Bush Administration.

Reacting to these and other policy shifts, a number of leading authorities on U.S. foreign policies like Strobe Talbott, president of the Brookings Institution and ex-deputy Secretary of State under Bill Clinton, were quoted by the media as saying that “[T]here has never been as dramatic a change within a single presidency between term one and term two in terms of the tone and, to some significant extent, the substance of policy.” Naturally, liberal foreign policy analysts would applaud Bush’s diplomatic initiatives, whereas Neo-Con critics like John Bolton were openly defiant and critical of Bush’s “change of heart” in abandoning his hardline stance toward his adversaries.

Clearly, in his second term in office, Bush’s greater realism was welcome to many students of American foreign policy, but “[T]he question is, is it too little too late?” some asked.⁸ U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s recent *Foreign Affairs* essay “Rethinking the

National Interest” seemed to reflect and underscore the underlining rationale of this “new strategic shift of the Bush administration foreign policy” billed as “the New American Realism.”⁹

“After 9/11, the United States was called to lead with a new perspective on threats and opportunities—recognizing that it [was] vital to U.S. national security that states be willing and able to meet the full” challenges. (But) “the range of their responsibilities, will go beyond their borders and within them,” to which the United States must turn. This is uniquely American realism... that “has guided policy for the past eight years, and it must continue to do so in the years to come,” so Rice argued.¹⁰

Toward A Stable Security Order?

This “strategic shift in U.S. foreign policy” was more subtle and gradual in the making as it became clearly evident in its new approach to the Northeastern security landscape, including negotiations with the DPRK within the context of the Six-party talks on nuclear disablement. The new security environment began to appear first among the Northeast Asian countries with the erosion of the Cold War era the U.S.-Japan-South Korea triangles of past years.

As China and Japan attempted to expand their influence in the region, a new, more competitive strategic triangle—the United States, Japan, and China eventually arose on the horizon.¹¹ Given improved relations with China and Russia, South Korea’s security dependency on the United States was also reduced significantly in the years 1998-2008. Through the diversification of its export markets to other regions of the world, the Korean economy was no longer dependent on the American market. China had come to have a longer-term interest in seeing a growth of Chinese interest and a reduction of U.S. and Japanese influence on the Korean peninsula.¹²

A subtle shift in its strategic landscape had taken place with the launching of the Six-party Talks in 2003. At one of the subsequent meetings with U.S. chief negotiator Ambassador Christopher Hill, on February 19 of 2008 in Beijing, the DPRK chief negotiator, Kim Kye Gwan, boldly turned down a proposal that had been made initially by U.S. President Bush to North Korean leader Kim Jong-il in a letter hand delivered by Hill in 2007. The Bush letter made a formal declaration of the plutonium program in the Six-party talks, as separate from a side-letter listing equipment and components it had acquired for uranium enrichment. Later that month, former US Defense Secretary William Perry, who had accompanied the New York Philharmonic to Pyongyang

for its historic concert, also carried a message from Secretary of State Rice offering to keep the side-letter confidential.

U.S. Secretary of State Rice, in her subsequent visits to Tokyo and Beijing, also had a message of her own on the declaration. Rice stated out of frustration that "I really have less concern about what form it takes or how many pieces of paper there may have to be or how many times it may have to go back and forth. I am just concerned that by the time we get to the end of this phase, we have some clarity so we know what we're looking for at the third phase."

During the last year of the Bush Administration, the United States was aiming at making a deal with the DPRK on the implementation of the nuclear disablement. These included stopping North Korea from producing more plutonium for nuclear weapons, by inducing Pyongyang to disable its nuclear plutonium facilities at Yongbyon, making them more difficult and time-consuming to restart, and persuading Pyongyang to declare how much nuclear material it had and the equipment and components it had acquired to make more – a necessary step to negotiating their elimination.

The U.S. President was on a week-long trip to Beijing to attend the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics on August 8 instead of boycotting the event to criticize the human rights situation inside China, including the treatment of Tibet. During his Asian trip with a stop-over in Bangkok, Bush delivered a speech expressing his concerns over the fate of China's dissidents.¹³

Bush also highlighted the U.S.'s security ties with many countries in the region, including South Korea, which he had visited earlier in the week, as well as Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines, where U.S. troops had been helping the Philippine military root out al Qaeda-affiliated terrorists in the south of the country.¹⁴ A strong theme in Bush's Asia trip was thus his belief that the U.S. needed to cooperate with its partners in Asia to achieve their common goals.

Bush said in Seoul on August 6 that the U.S. was constantly seeking to reinvigorate its alliances in Asia and that its efforts to pursue Six-Party Talks on North Korea's nuclear program involving both Koreas, the U.S., Japan, China and Russia had helped bring about Pyongyang's decision to destroy a nuclear-reactor cooling tower in June. The importance of that collaborative approach was echoed in Bush's planned remarks about Myanmar, also known as Burma. Myanmar's repressive military regime was a source of constant embarrassment to many of the U.S.'s allies in the region, but some countries—notably China and Thailand—actively did business with the junta, despite sanctions imposed by the U.S. and European Union.¹⁵

The U.S. foreign policy accent on triggering change in the Asian security environment, an example being the DPRK nuclear problem, was met by resistance during the twilight zone of the Bush Administration's second term in office. Despite recent efforts, the DPRK nuclear problem was resistant to a solution, partially because the DPRK refused to sign the verification protocol, insisting that the U.S. act first to delist them from the terrorist list. North Korea obviously lacked strong motivation to solve the problem before the Bush's second term ends shortly.¹⁶

Asymmetry of Power, and Stalemate, in Inter-Korean Relations

The primary reasons inter-Korean relations have remained static and stalemated rather than dynamic and flourishing have to do with the following key factors. First is a growing imbalance and asymmetry in power relations between the capitalist South Korea and the socialist North Korea, which have implications for the economic health of the respective Korean states. The second factor that keeps the current stalemate in inter-Korean relations intact rather than changing has to do with Pyongyang's displeasure over a turn to conservatism in South Korean politics.

The gap between North and South Korea is widening, rather than narrowing, in their socio-economic aspects. An official inter-Korean economic contact was established in 2000 thanks to North South Korea summitry in Pyongyang. But subsequent economic interaction has not helped to bridge this gap between the two sides. A series of inter-Korean economic ministerial talks, held on and off between the two sides, were instrumental in promoting economic exchanges and cooperation between the two sides, and so were a series of divided family meetings in the border towns held on humanitarian grounds.

This poor record of achievements in inter-Korean economic relations, however, suggests that North-South Korea relations are more likely to remain as one of asymmetry in power rather than one restoring both balance and harmony between the two sides in the years to come. Under these circumstances, it is only natural that inter-Korean dialogue and exchanges have remained stagnant and stalemated in 2008.

On the second factor, Pyongyang's displeasure was shown over the new conservative GNP comeback in South Korean internal politics. North Korean frustration can be understood best within the context of what had preceded the Lee Myung-bak administration in the inter-Korean dialogue, dating back to the second inter-Korean summit talks in Pyongyang on October 2-4, conversations attended by ex-President Roh Moo-hyun.

The Lull of Silence Presages Vicious Anti-Lee Myung-bak Rhetoric

On the eve of the scheduled Presidential election of December 19, 2007, the governments in Seoul and Pyongyang decided to go ahead with their inter-Korean summitry, just over seven-years after the historic North-South Korea summitry of June 2000. The timing of this summit meeting owed as much to the change of political atmosphere as to an improvement in the Six-party talks on the North Korean denuclearization, following Pyongyang's important decision on July 15 to suspend the operation of its Yongbyon nuclear complex and facilities.

ROK President Roh Moo-hyun's visit to Pyongyang from October 2 to 4 and his meeting with Chairman Kim Jong Il of the DPRK National Defense Commission marked a new milestone in the annals of inter-Korean relations. It was only the second time in nearly six decades that the leaders of the two Koreas had met face-to-face. The first such meeting in June 2000 enabled the Roh Administration to launch a new era of reconciliation, with ever-expanding exchanges and cooperation in the cultural and economic fields. The Roh-Kim summit, in fact, was designated officially as the "2007 South-North Summit" that signaled Roh's desire to distance himself from the Kim Dae Jung government's legacy.¹⁷

The lame-duck president Roh had an audacity, and ambition, to be recorded as the one who successfully had a face-to-face encounter with the North Korean leader before his term ended. On the surface, Roh's motives and objectives seemed relatively transparent: he was looking to build his legacy. The timing of the summit lent itself to the charge that it might be a well-calculated political gambit, for Roh had only four-and-a-half months left in his term of office. The seventeenth Presidential election was only two months away.

Kim Jong-Il was conspicuously absent from the welcoming banquet. Kim Yong-Nam, as chairman of the North's Supreme People's Assembly, hosted later that day. The two would meet again on the following day during two sessions of summit meetings. On the third and final day, Kim Jong-Il hosted a farewell luncheon. The October 2007 summit was hailed by his supporters as opening "Korea's New Era of Détente," and producing a landmark declaration that contained the more specific details on Korean security and economic cooperation between the two sides.¹⁸

North Korea's New Year's joint editorial on policy directions for 2008 made no mention of the election of Lee Myung-bak nor repeated its attacks on the GNP, as it had on previous occasions. Instead, the editorial denounced "pro-U.S. flunkeyism and treason against the nation." Entitled "Let's Glorify 2008, the 60th Anniversary of the People's Republic, as a Historic Year That Will Shine in the History of the Father-

land,” the editorial added that “People from all walks of life in North and South must be firmly united for the sake of the national cause” that included the need to “thoroughly implement” the inter-Korean summit of October agreement on economic cooperation.¹⁹

Pyongyang, however, soon broke its silence by criticizing the Lee Myung-Bak Administration and its policy. The official party organ, *Rodong Shinmun*, denounced President Lee as a “traitor” in a new twist to increase tensions between the two sides. It rejected Lee’s proposal to help North Korea raise its annual per capita GNP to US \$3,000 if it scrapped its nuclear program, and opened up to the outside world, as an “anti-unification declaration” and as “reactionary pragmatism.” It also claimed that denuclearization was not an inter-Korean issue “but a matter between (North) Korea and the U.S.”²⁰

Warning that “Lee’s presidency was a ‘thorny’ factor in inter-Korean relations,” the newspaper ended with a threat that “We’ll see how South Korea will get along with its back turned against us” and that “We can get along on our own without South Korea.”²¹ It will obviously take time to see whether there will be any change in the frozen phase of inter-Korean relations for the foreseeable future.

In the past, North Korea had never hesitated to excoriate Lee Myung-bak’s GNP as “nation-selling traitors” and “pro-US flunkeys.” Its delay in commenting on Lee and his electoral victory, however, bespoke a debate in Pyongyang over what to make of him. He professed to be a pragmatist, and the Kaesong and Kumgang zones carried on business as usual, although, as described below on July 11 a fatal shot rang out that carried ominous implications.

Inter-Korean relations have gone from bad to worse during the first six months of the Lee Myung-Bak Administration. A 53 year-old South Korean female tourist was shot dead, on July 12 by a North Korean soldier in the Mt. Kumgang resort area. The public in South Korea was naturally concerned that such a tragedy should not be repeated, but the North rejected a proposal for conducting a joint investigation with the South on the ground that it was a sensitive military installation.

The DPRK’s official news channel finally reported the fatal shooting long after it occurred. An announcer from the state-run Korean Central Broadcasting Station reported the news during a bulletin that focused on a statement threatening the expulsion of ROK officials from the Mt. Kumgang area. The central radio station reported the news in a similar tone. Observers speculate the DPRK regime had decided to make the issue public at home in response to ROK attempts to publicize it in the international arena.²²

With the North Korean stance on Lee's South Korea hardening, the DPRK chose not to march together with ROK team members during the 2008 Beijing Olympic opening ceremony under a single unified neutral flag as it has previously. Chinese attempts at sitting South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak and North Korea's Number two leader, Kim Yong-nam, at a same table during a welcoming lunch hosted by PRC President Hu Jin-tao was also foiled because of North Korean objections.

“It's the Economy Stupid!” North

The primary causes for this asymmetry in power relations stem from differences in the socio-economic systems of production and distribution between the two sides. The capitalist and market economy of the South is not mirrored by the socialist, planned economy in the North. The policies of the two are also in sharp contrast between an interdependent, entrepreneurial, dynamic economy, in the South and an independent, self-reliant, stagnant economy of the North. The results of these differences underscore the rise of the dynamic and growth-oriented market economy in the South and the existence of the stagnant, autarchic, and self-sufficient planned economy in the North.

The North Korean economy has undergone a steep decline in recent decades following the former Soviet Union's collapse in 1990 and the devastating famine and flood of the mid-1990s. North Korea literally became a failed state as the socialist state abandoned its basic “social contract of food delivery” to the populace.²³ This meant that individual households, enterprises, local party organs, and even military units were forced to engage in market-like behavior. North Korea's economic transition over the past decade can best be understood not as a top-down state-led reform but rather as a bottom-up process of marketization in response to state failures.²⁴

As the South Korean economy keeps growing, the gap between the North and South will not likely be bridged in the years ahead. The Northern economy until the 1970s was of a comparable scale, and, initially, it was even ahead of the South, but the North has now become utterly dwarfed by the South. According to Seoul's Bank of Korea's figures, South Korean GNI in 2007 was \$902.5 billion, a figure that was 36.4 times the North's. Put another way, it will take less than 3 per cent annual growth in the South to be able to add the equivalent of an entire Northern economy.²⁵

The North Korean economy in the post-Soviet era has deteriorated beyond repair and has continued to decline in recent years. North Korea is “inching yet closer to an economic abyss” that may generate new famine and starvation not seen since the mid-1990s. The situation of food

shortages in the North is more complicated this time around, however. Because of the global food shortage and rising food prices, Kim Jong-il faces the dilemma of whether to comply with the Six-Party Accord, so as to receive food and energy assistance as well as an end to economic sanctions.

The deteriorating situation is depicted by one recent observer as desperate; Kim Jong-il may find that his Achilles heel is his country's decrepit economy and his inability to feed his own people.²⁶ A new South Korean President, Lee Myung-bak, is not as amenable to the North Korean economic difficulties as his predecessors were for rendering food assistance and economic aid, without reciprocity from the North. The stalemate in inter-Korean relations has clearly made the situation worse than ever.

As the South Korean economy keeps growing and prospering as a dynamic capitalist market economy, the gap between the North and South will also increase from what was once a ratio of equity to that of increasing asymmetry. It is no accident that during the decade of an "arduous and forced march" of 1998-2007, North Korea turned to an outside world for humanitarian aide in food deliveries, so as to overcome the famine and starvation that included fertilizer and food from South Korea. This led to the survival of the Kim Jong-il regime and the continuation of its authoritarian dictatorship.

“Building a Peace Regime” or Activating Security Forum?

In the face of the failure of the Six-Party talks, the notion of moving to the next logical step of “building a peace regime” on the Korean peninsula seems premature. At this time and for the foreseeable future, the DPRK's refusal to accept a verification protocol likely limits any progress of the diplomatic front.

It also makes good sense to differentiate between “building a peace regime” and establishing a “peace forum” in the Northeast Asian region. These are two separate matters and, as such, they should not be treated in the same package. Whereas the “building a peace regime” is an anticipatory act for the future, establishing a “security forum” may already have been achieved under ASEAN auspices.

This “security forum” takes the form of ARF (or ASEAN Regional Forum), which has been promoted without much fanfare among ASEAN member countries that has also routinely included three APT (or ASEAN plus Three) countries, China, Japan and South Korea, during the annual ASEAN meetings. The ARF is typically held with the attendance of either the heads of government or foreign ministers, as happened during the ASEAN meeting in Singapore in the summer of 2008.

An architectural design for “building a peace regime” in Northeast Asia, as an extension of the Six-Party Talks process, has already been floated (for instance, by U.S. Secretary of State Codoleezza Rice). The implementation of this plan, however, may never come about. The notion of creating an OSCE (Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe) body in East Asia in the form of OSCA (Organization of Security and Cooperation in Asia) has been floated by some visionaries and idealists, but has remained an idea only.

Yet, in the absence of a emerging “nascent security community, as prevailed in Western Europe at the time of the signing of the Helsinki accord during the Cold War years, no such network or “security community” in Northeast Asia seems to be identifiable. The notion of “building a peace regime” seems too idealistic as a dream for the future, one that is not realistic or feasible at this stage of promoting regional development in East Asia.

“Peace Regime-Building” as an Imagined Task for Korea’s Future?

In July 2008, foreign ministers from the United States, Russia and the DPRK joined their counterparts at the scheduled ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum) sessions at the Shangri-la Singapore Hotel. This was the second time the U.S. and the DPRK foreign ministers had met in an ASEAN forum. The remaining three countries, China, Japan and South Korea, were already participants by virtue of their APS (ASEAN Plus Three) status, which they had enjoyed for many years.

“Building a Peace Regime beyond the Six-Party Talks” process has been proposed as an ideal result of diplomatic conversations and negotiations. The proponents of this notion say that it is still useful to review some of the “conceptual issues relative to the notion of security architecture” for the region of Northeast Asia, as a logical next step beyond the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, “when and if” the signing of a peace treaty to replace the 1953 Korean War Armistice Agreement materializes. The idea of establishing a “Korean Peace Regime” has thus been floated in various diplomatic circles. The first official reference to “peace regime” occurred in the September 19, 2005, Six-Party Talks “Joint Statement.”

The joint statement provided, for instance, that “The Six Parties [are] committed to joint efforts for lasting peace and stability in North Asia” and, for such purposes, “the directly related parties will negotiate a permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula at an appropriate separate forum.” The Six-party Talk members also “agreed to explore ways and means for promoting security cooperation in Northeast Asia,” via one of the five “Working Groups” to be established.

The second occasion for articulating this ideal came during the November 2005 summit meeting of U.S. President George W. Bush and ROK President Roh Moo-Hyun, in Kyungju, Korea. In a statement issued after the meeting, both leaders welcomed the Six-Party accord and spoke of the mutually-reinforcing nature of the denuclearization talks and permanent peace negotiations, even if the peace talks involved a more limited participation.²⁷ They said “pursuant to the September 19th Six Party Joint Statement, the two leaders agreed that discussions on a peace regime should take place amongst directly-related parties in a forum separate from the Six-party Talks and following progress in those Talks, and expected that the discussions on a peace regime and the Six-party Talks will be mutually reinforcing.” Going beyond that, and premised on the strength of the U.S.-ROK alliance, the two leaders also specified that success in the peace talks depended upon success in the nuclear talks: “Reaffirming that the alliance is strong, the two leaders concurred that the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue is essential for establishing [a] durable peace on the Korean Peninsula.” The two leaders also agreed that peace talks should lead to a reduction of tensions, which would, in turn, facilitate “full” North-South reconciliation and unification.²⁸

The third instance of reference to the “Korean peace regime” had to do with the North-South Summit meeting held October 2-4, 2007, in Pyongyang. There, participants adopted the “Declaration on the Advancement of South-North Korean Relations, Peace and Prosperity” which included references to the Korean peace regime. The Declaration in Paragraph four stated that “the South and the North both recognize the need to end the current armistice regime and build a permanent peace regime.” “The South and the North have also agreed to work together to advance the matter of having the leaders of the *three or four* parties directly concerned to convene on the Peninsula and declare an end to the war.”²⁹

The peculiar reference to “three or four” parties raised eyebrows in diplomatic circles, but the ROK Ministry of Unification attempted “to explain it away by saying that it was up to China as to whether it wanted to come, but it would certainly be welcome.” This seemed like a rather “strained” and unusual interpretation, but a Ministry spokesman was quoted as saying that “the proposal for such a summit and the formulation that was used was made by the North, and President Roh agreed to it at the last moment.”³⁰

Assuming that the Six-Party Talks progress with the satisfactory completion of phase two (nuclear disablement), and movement into phase three, by adopting a detailed protocol of implementation, the future

roadmap of the Six-Party Talks calls for sketching out frameworks for a peace regime on the Korean peninsula and a peace mechanism for Northeast Asia.

The benchmark is laid out in the September 19, 2005, Joint Statement issued in Beijing at the conclusion of the Fourth Round of Six-Party Talks. Article 1 of the statement commits the “directly related parties” to negotiate “a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula at an appropriate separate forum.” The Six Parties also “agreed to explore ways and means for promoting security cooperation in Northeast Asia.” The latter initiative was referred for follow-up talks to a Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism Working Group, among the five working groups established in Beijing in February 2007.

A Declaratory Policy or “Process-Oriented Approach” to Korean Peace?

Despite the explicit above-noted statement, there arises considerable confusion and debate as to what is exactly meant by “building the peace regime on the Korean peninsula.” As one astute observer noted, from a policy perspective two distinct paths to two very different types of peace regime can be differentiated and identified.³¹ One path, in effect, is a well-defined “to do list” which, on realization, ends in a peace regime that ratifies and supports a preexisting, *de facto* state of peace. It results from a resolution of issues required to produce a state of peace. A second path is process-oriented. On the Korean peninsula, many progressives see the latter as beginning with a “peace declaration,” which would then usher in a peace regime. The reality of power politics and pragmatism, however, will determine the diplomatic outcome, if any.

On the Korean Peninsula peace-building, the first step on this pragmatic path is the “denuclearization of North Korea,” without which peace on the Peninsula is unattainable. The concept of peace with a nuclear armed North Korea represents “the ultimate in both illusion and delusion,” according to this observer, who clearly reflects the philosophy of political realism; moreover, foreign policy must remain focused on the foundation of a peace regime.³² Other measures in a first step include an agreement to replace the 1953 Armistice, to which the United States, North Korea and China are parties, with either a political agreement or a peace treaty that would add South Korea to the signatories.

Despite North Korea’s long-standing efforts to de-legitimize the ROK, there can be no peace on the peninsula absent true “South-North reconciliation and mutual recognition.” Likewise, Seoul and Pyongyang should begin to implement the 1991 Basic Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression, and Cooperation and Exchange, a document which

stands as a prototype for a peace regime. North Korea's denuclearization would, meanwhile, open the door to the normalization of U.S.-DPRK relations. All of these steps, in short, are aimed at actual threat reduction; collectively, they realize a state of peace and a supporting peace regime.

A second path, "process oriented," is favored by many progressives who see this as beginning with a "peace declaration" which would usher in a peace regime. In this context, South and North Korea would work incrementally to resolve individual issues and build mutual confidence in the expectation, or hope, that success in one area will build momentum toward resolution of other outstanding issues. A widening, spill-over effect would culminate in Pyongyang's agreement to surrender its WMD arsenal. Whereas the Six-Party process would see the chief delegates from each member state officially subscribing to the first path of peace-building via the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, some political leaders in North and South Korea seem to prefer the second path. A case in point is the Second Korean Summit and the October 4, 2007, South-North Declaration.

In Article 4 of the Declaration, both Seoul and Pyongyang agreed "to implement smoothly" the process of denuclearization through the Six-Party Talks. In Article 5, however, both Korean leaders agreed to "facilitate, expand and further inter-Korean economic cooperation projects on a continual basis....." The question that arises, however, is whether, in the event the implementation of denuclearization does not go smoothly (and does anyone expect that it will?) the ROK's economic engagement of North Korea will continue? Nowhere in the Declaration is there any reference or even hint of "conditionality or linkage" to implementation of denuclearization as a prerequisite.

There is also a possibility that South Korea's economic engagement of North Korea will leapfrog the Six-Party process. If it does, it may serve as a disincentive to denuclearization, allowing Pyongyang to keep its nuclear weapons while enjoying the benefits of South Korea's trade, aid and investment. Yet, denuclearization must remain the core of any peace regime building. Thus, the question is "not aspirations and intentions but implementation" and a hardheaded realistic approach should guide and dictate the peace building process on the Korean peninsula in the days ahead.

Excellent blueprints and master plans for an architectural design of the Korean Peninsula Peace Regime already exist. One study report is: *A Framework for Peace and Security in Korea and Beyond* commissioned by The Atlantic Council and published as its Policy Paper, in April 2007.³³ Also in progress is the possibility of a greater and enhanced role for the United Nations by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, so as to link

the Six-Party Talks with United Nations agencies, including the IAEA. Underlying this initiative is the belief that “a strengthened ‘good office’ role for the UN Secretary General” has more to do with “coupl(ing) the message of denuclearization with a humane, well-coordinated package of proposals that address the security, economic, energy, and humanitarian concerns of the DPRK (that) could (in turn) effectively serve to advance the six-party talks toward a successful conclusion.”³⁴

Future Problems and Prospects

North Korea said on August 25 that it had halted the disablement of its nuclear facilities because the U.S. refused to strike it from a list of state sponsors of terrorism as expected. Despite this turn of events in the Six-Party process of nuclear disablement, Pyongyang hopefully will continue to acknowledge the *modus operandi* of bi-multilateral diplomacy that the six-party talks represent with a political will to conduct an international dialogue. No one knows better than the DPRK that it will be more advantageous for them to maintain the Six-Party Talks process intact.

U.S. Ambassador to Korea Alexander Vershbow said that negotiations with North Korea are still going on behind the scenes. “We are continuing to work ... and the talks have not broken off... I believe there is still a reasonable chance that we’ll find a solution so that they can move forward.”³⁵ That is why the DPRK should no longer postpone the verification regime. Vershbow, speaking to reporters, said, “We need to be able to use well established verification techniques if we are to have confidence that the verification is accurate.” Some of the things North Korea provided, such as Russian aluminum tubes samples and thousands of documents “raised as many questions as they answered.”³⁶

But the North Korea’s Kim Jong-il regime is unlikely to repeat the similar mistake of “confession diplomacy” as happened to the Koizumi-Kim summitry of September 2002. Once before, the North Koreans were already burned by Kim Jong-il’s 2002 confession of the 1980s kidnappings of Japanese nationals.³⁷ They felt that they had only raised new hurdles to normalization with Tokyo, as they were still wary of disclosing the list of enrichment equipment or nuclear proliferation activities. They feared that if it became public it would be held up as the latest example of their perfidy.

Hence, it is only natural that North Korea not only refused to itemize the Pakistan-supplied centrifuges and components to make more of them that it had acquired starting in the late 1990’s – but they flatly denied the existence of any equipment it would be obliged to abandon in the next phase of the Six-Party Talks. The U.S. Chief negotiator, Christopher

Hill, opted instead to draw up his own list of what US intelligence believed the North had acquired. On March 1, Hill gave it to the Chinese to pass to the North Koreans, but at a meeting with him in Geneva on March 13-14, Kim Kye Gwan refused to check off the items on the US list. Kim also denied North Korean involvement in Syria's nuclear efforts.

Despite the fact that the DPRK's denuclearization has been primarily addressed by the U.S. and China, within the context of the Six-Party Talks, the challenges posed by North Korea are global in nature and the United Nations role in safeguarding the NPT regime is a key to the future of humanity in the 21st century, if a nuclear-free security environment is to be maintained. In this regard, a recent report on the possible U.N. role in the DPRK denuclearization is right on target. As its author, Anne Wu noted: "The perception of the NPT as a hollow shell with respect to containing proliferation could trigger further defections from the treaty and encourage non-nuclear parties to begin to pursue nuclear weapons programs of their own." The UN's facilitation of an early end to the crisis might be seen as a wake-up call, whereas continued peripheral and ineffectual involvement will only serve to further erode confidence in the global nonproliferation regime."³⁸

Underlying the resistance and reluctance of the DPRK to respond to the pressures exerted by the Six-Party Talks on adopting a verification requirement is the history of what had already happened to North Korea, following the September 2003 Koizumi-Kim Jong-il summitry. As already noted, Pyongyang considered that a diplomatic defeat. In this regard what the Japanese call the "Peninsula Questions" episode, referring to the DPRK nuclear standoff, seems to be appropriate. What the author Funabashi calls "the (Korean) peninsula question" in the late 19th century in Northeast Asia may or may not repeat itself in the 21st century.

Ironically, the Clinton-era US-DPRK missile agreement was aborted eight years ago at the dawn of the new century, the Bush era US-DPRK nuclear deal under the Six-Party Talks in 2008 may or may not repeat itself in the days ahead under the new US Administration in 2009. Hopefully, this will not be the case. Finally, it is both ironic and tragic that the moment of truth has arisen at the dusk of the Bush administration and on the eve of the U.S. Presidential and Congressional Elections of November 4, 2008.

The latest Lee-Hu summitry in 2008 at Seoul, on the day after the closing of China's successful 2008 Summer Olympics, will lay out the new context for the future dealings of the Six-Party Talks on North Korea's nuclear disablement. A closer strategic cooperation between

Beijing and Seoul, vis-à-vis the North Korean nuclear and security threat, is likely to materialize in the days ahead, thanks to the Seoul-Beijing rapprochement and strategic cooperation accord just concluded.³⁹

Fortunately, this time around South Korea's Lee Myung-bak administration seems to be more realistic and is well aware of the risks and dangers of making undue concessions to the North on matters of national security. Hence, a new defense white paper that calls North Korea a "substantial threat," but not necessarily a "main enemy," is in the making and preparation for its release before 2008 ends.⁴⁰ Also, further tapping of the possibilities and limitations of realigning and retooling the U.S.-ROK alliance should also be explored, with a view to seeking an off-shore global strategy for the United States in the 21st century.⁴¹

Notes:

¹ Rodger Baker, "Asia's Security Role Goes Global," Stratfor *Geopolitical Intelligent Report*, based in London, 2008. Also, on Dokdo isles controversy, see: a recent *NYT* essay on August 31, 2008.

² "U.S. Board Marks Dokdo as Korean at Bush's Orders," *Digital Chosun.com*, July 31, 2008.

³ Ibid.

⁴ On an account of the anti-U.S. beef import protest and candlelight vigils in South Korea, see this author's *Transforming Korean Politics: Democracy, Reform and Culture*, 2nd edition, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2009 (forthcoming).

⁵ Richard Wolf, "Bush turns attentions abroad: Foreign focus emphasizes international alliances." *USA Today*, July 31, 2008: 4A.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ As for a plea not to rely exclusively on US primacy, see: "A Prisoner to Primacy" by Carl Conetta, *Project on Defense Alternatives 07*, December 2007.

⁸ Wolf, Bush turns attention, Op. Cit.

⁹ Condoleezza Rice, "Rethinking the National Interest." *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 87, Number 4 (July/August 2008): 1, 2-27.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ "Korea's New Era of Détente." *Korea Policy Review*, November, 2007: 8-9.

¹² Robert Sutter, "China's Foreign Policy toward North Korea—A U.S. Perspective." *International Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Fall 2007): 158.

¹³ Hookway, James, "Bush to Convey Concerns Over Fate of China Dissidents." *Wall Street Journal*, Report from Bangkok, August 7, 2008.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "Bush's Diplomacy, Challenged at the End of Term," *Yonhap News Agency*, August 20, 2008.

¹⁷ B.C. Koh, "The Second Inter-Korean Summit," IFES Forum, October 9, 2007.

¹⁸ Korea's New Era of Détente, Op. Cit.

¹⁹ "N. Korea New Year's Message Stresses Cooperation with South." *Digital Chsunilbo*, January 20, 2008.

²⁰ "N. Korea Denounces 'Traitor' Lee Myung-Bak," 2008. *Digital Chsunilbo*, April 2, 2008.

²¹ Ibid.

²² "State TV informs N Koreans of Mt. Kungang Shooting," *Digital Chosonilbo.com*, 2008.

²³ See Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, *Famine in North Korea: Markets, Aid, and Reform* Haggard and Noland, 2007.

²⁴ Also, see Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, "North Korea in 2007," *Asian Survey*, January 2008.

²⁵ Aidan Foster-Carter, "Lee Outflanked." NAPSNet Policy Forum 08-059A, July 31, 2008.

²⁶ Dick K. Nanto, "The DPRK's Decrepit Economy, Pyongyang's Achilles Heel," *International Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Fall 2007): 24.

²⁷ Joint Declaration on the ROK-U.S. Alliance and Peace on the Korean Peninsula, Kyongju, South Korea, 17 November 2005.

²⁸ Alan D. Romberg, "A Korean Peace Regime: Implications and Tasks for the ROK-U.S. Alliance and Regional Security Architecture." *IFANS Review* (Seoul) vol. 125, No. 2 (December 2007): 52-53,

²⁹ Emphasis added. As for a detailed analysis of the Roh-Kim Summit declaration, see

Jeong Se-Hyun, "South-North Summit Lays the Basis for Peace Regime." *Korea Policy Policy Review*, October, 2007: 9-11.

³⁰ Yoo Cheong-mo, "Roh Instructs Cabinet to Devise Road Map for Inter-Korean Cooperation," *Yonhap*, 5 October 2007, as cited in Romberg, A Korean Peace Regime 51-64, 54 (footnote 3).

³¹ James J. Przystup, "Peace Regimes, Security Mechanisms and the Road Ahead." *IFANS Review* Volume 15, No. 2 (December 2007): 23.

³² *Ibid.*, 23.

³³ *A Framework for Peace and Security in Korea and Northeast Asia*. Report of the Atlantic Council Working Group on North Korea. Policy Paper, April 2007. Also, see Donald G. Gross, "Prospective Elements of a Peace Regime in Korea and Proposed Steps to Achieve It." *IFANS Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (December 2007): 31-50.

³⁴ Anne Wu, "Denuclearization of the DPRK – A Role for the U.N.?" *KEI Academic Paper Series* Vol. 3, No. 5 (July 2008): 6.

³⁵ "N. Korea Nuclear Verification a Must: U.S. Envoy," *Digital Chosonilbo.com*, August 29, 2008.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ See Funabashi Ch 1-3 here.

³⁸ Anne Wu, Denuclearization, 3.

³⁹ Na Jeong-ju, "Seoul, Beijing to Strengthen Ties over NK Nukes", *Korea Times*, August 8, 2008; Kwang-tae Kim, "China, S. Korea Agree to Keep Working on N. Korea Deal," *Associated Press, Seoul*, August 25, 2008.

⁴⁰ "Defense White Paper to Call N. Korea 'Substantial Threat'" *The Chosonilbo.com*, August 29.

⁴¹ In this regard, see the latest issue of the *International Journal of Korean Studies*: especially, Choong Nam Kim, "Rethinking ROK's Strategic Posture in the Twenty-First Century" and Patrick M. Morgan, "ReAligning the Military and Political Dimensions of the ROK-US Alliance: The Possibilities." *International Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol. XI, No. 2 (Fall/Winter 2007): 94-130, especially 29-69 and 70-97.

