

# **Embracing Multilateralism: A U.S.-ROK Alliance for Regional Security**

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## **Abstract**

Pessimism pervades most discussions of the security situation in Northeast Asia, particularly on the Korean peninsula where efforts to weaken the North Korean regime and stop its nuclear weapons program have failed. This article proposes a new approach to regional and Korean security: creation of a Northeast Asia Security Dialogue Mechanism structured so as to respond to any number of disputes and issues before they reach the point of serious confrontations. Policy changes are proposed in the U.S.-South Korea alliance and by North Korea to promote agreement on a dialogue mechanism. The advantages for these parties, as well as for China, Japan, and Russia, in having a security dialogue mechanism are also discussed. North Korea's nuclear weapons should probably not be the NEASDM's first order of business. Rather, any of a number of other security concerns—for example, environmental protection, labor practices, and human rights—might better be addressed before tackling the most difficult issue of all.

**Keywords:** Nuclear weapons; Northeast Asia security dialogue mechanism; U.S.-ROK relations; U.S.-DPRK relations; Six Party Talks; China's foreign policy; multilateralism in East Asia

## **Introduction**

When the Obama administration took office, expectations were high that major policy departures from the Bush years, particularly in East Asia, would be forthcoming. Among those expectations were that Obama would pursue denuclearization and normalization of relations with North Korea simultaneously rather than in sequence that Obama might send a high-level delegation to Pyongyang as a sign of respect, and that Obama himself might visit North Korea for a summit. In that new context, the new South Korean government would either have to follow the United States in improving inter-Korean relations or face isolation.<sup>1</sup> There were also expectations of a more cooperative relationship with

China: “We’re all in the same boat,” said Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in Beijing when the financial crisis hit in 2008. But none of these expectations were realized. U.S. policy toward North Korea, often described as “strategic patience,” ended in 2010. So did patience with China, reflected in American lecturing on human rights, trade, and currency valuation when Hu Jintao visited Washington to preach mutual respect in January 2011.

Whether these U.S. policy shifts occurred because of North Korea’s aggressive behavior, Republican successes in the 2010 midterm elections, or intractable economic difficulties, the fact is that U.S. policy in the second half of the Obama administration is not what Obama had hoped for in 2009. North Korea and China have responded to a hardening of U.S. policy with tough talk of their own, so that today the administration faces a security situation in Northeast Asia that might mean a return to the Cold War. (Of course, on the Korean peninsula, the Cold War has never stopped.) With the death of Kim Jong Il, policy making on North Korea must be recalibrated. But up to now Obama’s North Korea policy resembles that of the George W. Bush administration, and Lee Myung Bak’s government, far from lagging behind U.S. policy as was once feared in Washington, is entirely in step with it—a hard-line policy that puts denuclearization ahead of engagement through dialogue, and views North Korea as economically and politically unstable.<sup>2</sup> U.S. relations with China have deteriorated as the Obama team decided to get tough with Beijing over currency, human rights, and territorial issues—only to have the Chinese respond with sharp critiques of U.S. financial policies during the debt crisis.<sup>3</sup> China has run into trouble with Vietnam and other claimants to the South China Sea islands, and has reaffirmed close ties with North Korea. South Korea’s political honeymoon with China may be over even as the economic ties remain strong: Beijing’s refusal to condemn North Korea over the *Cheonan* and Yeonpyeong Island attacks, or press Pyongyang on the HEU discovery, reflects a side of China’s foreign policy that Seoul does not want to see. The thaw in China-Japan relations since the end of Koizumi’s rule has been replaced by renewed tensions over territorial matters, causing a redirection of Japanese defense policy from north to southwest.<sup>4</sup> The United States has clearly encouraged that policy shift as well as the resumption after two years of South Korea-Japan military cooperation. Yet U.S.-Japan relations were sorely tested by the earthquake and tsunami, which left the Americans feeling misled

about the scope of the disaster—so much so that one former Japanese official referred to “a crisis in the United States-Japan alliance.”<sup>5</sup>

Thus, in place of an era of engagement and denuclearization that Obama’s assumption of power seemed to promise, we have lines being drawn in the sand between states sympathetic with China (which includes Russia<sup>6</sup>) and states aligned with the United States. To be sure, there are disagreements within these alignments. And there have been positive developments in Northeast Asia as well, such as a considerable lowering of tensions between China and Taiwan. But on the whole, the regional picture is bleak at a time when the United States is preoccupied with Middle East affairs.

We might, however, take a longer-range view of that picture. From the vantage point of the last 30 or so years, conflict management rather than war has been the predominant theme. The so-called “East Asian Peace” means that non-military intervention by foreign powers, low-intensity internal conflicts, and reduced casualties have been the main trends. But East Asian disputes, especially over maritime territory, are still long in duration and resistant to settlement.<sup>7</sup> Liberal theorists contend that increasing economic interdependence between states in East Asia creates incentives for overcoming political disputes and institutionalizing cooperation. While there is evidence for this view, it is also possible that stronger economic ties create conditions for states to press their claims without fear of war. Moreover, it is clear in East Asia that interdependence has by no means lessened states’ desire for stronger militaries, starting with China.<sup>8</sup> The key challenges for the region’s states, and in this study for US-Korea relations, remain, first, how to *manage or contain* active and potential interstate conflicts, and, second, how to create *incentives for peace*.

This article argues for a new approach to Northeast Asian regional security that necessarily includes a resetting of U.S.-ROK relations. The heart of this approach is establishment of a Northeast Asia Security Dialogue Mechanism (NEASDM) to deal not only with the North Korean nuclear issue but with nuclear weapons in general and with a range of other security-related matters. Politically, the time may be ripe for such an initiative: in 2012 leadership will either change or be subject to elections in the ROK, the United States, Russia, China, and Taiwan. Political leadership in Japan continues to be a revolving door. The death of Kim Jong Il in December 2011, and the succession of Kim Jong Un, raises numerous questions about political stability in North Korea and the

direction of its foreign policy. While an argument can be made that 2012 is therefore *not* a time for bold policy initiatives, new or reelected leaders may find that enhancing national and regional security is an important way to solidify domestic support and strengthen national security.

### **U.S.-ROK Relations and Multilateralism**

By most accounts, relations between the United States and the ROK have never been better than they are today. The Obama-Lee “vision statement” of 2009 set the tone for reaffirmation of security relations, including extended deterrence. Though the KORUS FTA has yet to be approved by the U.S. Senate, trade remains brisk at \$87 billion in 2010 and there seems to be bipartisan support for approval of KORUS (unlike the FTAs with Panama and Colombia that are also pending approval) now that the issue of U.S. auto exports to Korea has been resolved. Moreover, the two governments are on the same page on many other matters: North Korea policy, OpCon, and U.S. basing realignment and payments.

Left unacknowledged but clear to many analysts, however, is that a tough approach to North Korea has failed.<sup>9</sup> The military incidents in 2010, the HEU revelation, and the likelihood of the North’s production of additional nuclear warheads and improved ballistic missiles speak to that conclusion. As Jack Pritchard, the former special envoy for negotiations with North Korea, has said, “If U.S. policy remains on the current course, there is little potential that our security concerns will be resolved and every chance that North Korea will drift toward *de facto* nuclear weapons state status.”<sup>10</sup> Likewise, South Korea’s proposal to the North for bilateral dialogue is as dead on arrival as was “strategic patience.” United Nations sanctions and South Korea’s termination of trade do not seem to be hurting the North Korean leadership; far from it, coercive measures have led only to North Korean responses in kind. China has stuck to its longstanding position that negotiations are the only way to resolve the nuclear issue and that it will neither openly criticize nor punish the North for its aggressive behavior. Pyongyang under Kim Jong Il had indicated a willingness to re-start the Six Party Talks (6PT) “unconditionally” and establish a moratorium on nuclear-weapon tests and production, and on missile launches—a major change from its previous insistence that it would “never” return to the talks—but Washington and Seoul have been reluctant to get involved in another round of endless debate without a prior North Korean commitment to

complete and verifiable denuclearization. Conservative American analysts go further, arguing that the 6PT are “a trap” whereby North Korea can gain significant concessions without ever having to give up its nuclear weapons.<sup>11</sup> Judging from the statement issued at the conclusion of U.S.-Japan-ROK ministerial talks in December 2010, the Obama administration has taken a page from the Bush administration in believing that North Korea must prove its “seriousness of purpose” and that further talks with the North indeed have preconditions.<sup>12</sup> With a new regime in power in Pyongyang, the future of the 6PT is in doubt.

Frustrating though the 6PT have been, they represent the only long-running effort in Northeast Asia to carry out *and institutionalize* multilateral security dialogue. Moreover, the talks have produced consensus both on important implementing principles, such as “commitment for commitment, action for action,” and on concrete subjects, such as acceptance of North Korean sovereignty and normalization of relations with it, cooperation to provide North Korea with energy and other assistance, and denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Korea specialists and research organizations have put forward ideas for crafting a new package deal that might re-energize the 6PT. Many of these proposals have common assumptions—that North Korea genuinely believes it needs a nuclear-weapons deterrent against external threats; that it craves international legitimacy and respect, ingredients essential to regime survival; and that a combination of security assurances, a peace treaty, and engagement through diplomacy and development assistance will convince the North that it can safely terminate its nuclear-weapons program and either give up or warehouse its existing arsenal. Perhaps the 6PT will reconvene and incorporate these ideas in a new deal for the DPRK. But even if new talks do take place, it has to be acknowledged that previous six-party understandings—in September 2005 and in February 2007—contained some of those very ideas yet could not prevent subsequent deadlock.

The purpose here is not to dwell on the question of blame for previous failures to settle the nuclear issue.<sup>13</sup> Rather, it is to pick up on one other idea that was commonly agreed to by all six parties in the 2005 and 2007 talks, and that has not been altered since: the desirability of creating a regional security mechanism. It would seem that a regional security mechanism can be an opportunity for the U.S.-ROK alliance to recapture the initiative in dealing with North Korea. To be clear, it represents an approach to security opposite of the norm—that is, it

considers the security issues in Northeast Asia as involving much more than North Korea's nuclear weapons; and it asks us to consider the alliance in a multilateral context rather than in exclusively bilateral terms. The NEASDM idea rejects the widespread notion that no progress on regional security is possible until the nuclear issue is resolved.

Actually, high-level consideration of a multilateral approach to Korean and regional security has a long history in Korea as well as in the United States.<sup>14</sup> Kim Dae Jung, for example, was a strong proponent of “plus-3” (South Korea, China, Japan) within the ASEAN framework as well as of four-party (U.S.-PRC-ROK-DPRK) talks. Roh Moo Hyun looked for ways to reposition South Korea as an important player (a “balancer”) in the China-Japan rivalry. Lee Myung Bak has put forth a “global Korea” vision that looks for a Korean role beyond the peninsula. For instance, he has proposed that the ROK act as a bridge between countries in the financial crisis and on climate change. South Korea's chairing of the G-20 in 2010 and Lee's “green growth” initiatives—he has pledged funding equal to about two percent of GDP annually between 2009 and 2013—are other examples.<sup>15</sup> Because of his and his predecessors' efforts, South Korea has ample experience with regional and global multilateral activities. Besides the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) and the 6PT, these activities include the ASEAN process (ASEAN+3 and ARF), peacekeeping operations in the Middle East, multilateral assistance programs (such as to Afghanistan), anti-piracy operations off Somalia, and various trade, aid (OECD, APEC, WTO, Chiang Mai), and environmental groups (Climate Convention, Northeast Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation). If trilateral activity involving the United States and Japan is added to the list, such as the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG), South Korean experience is even more ample.<sup>16</sup> On the U.S. side, a number of specialists have argued that South Korean democracy is sufficiently advanced, and values are so shared with the United States, that the alliance should be viewed in global terms.<sup>17</sup> The “joint vision” statement that emerged from the Obama-Lee summit in June 2009 declared that the two countries would build “a comprehensive strategic alliance of bilateral, regional and global scope.”<sup>18</sup> This objective was reiterated when Lee visited Washington in October 2011.

In the light of alliance history, this expansion of purposes is both necessary and desirable.<sup>19</sup> To endure, alliances must be founded on a

sense of community, including shared values and common institutions. Their members do not always agree on specific policies, and indeed have independent foreign policies; but they do share a common mission and a desire for have close collaboration. As the recent debate about NATO's future makes clear, identifying and carrying through on new missions that go beyond an alliance's original geopolitical boundaries is a constant challenge. The U.S.-ROK alliance, with only two parties and a peninsula to defend, presents fewer growth problems than NATO. But as U.S. forward deployments in East Asia recede and South Korea's military no less than its economic superiority over the DPRK becomes more apparent, cooperation within the alliance will need to extend beyond the peninsula. As in NATO, Washington and Seoul will not always see eye to eye on specific policies—for example, with regard to China—but the sense of community still binds the two parties.

For South Korea to enhance its security through a multilateral entity such as the proposed NEASDM seems entirely in keeping with both the purposes of the alliance and Seoul's multilateral engagements. The one firm condition for its involvement, however, would seem to be active U.S. participation. Since a NEASDM would bring all six parties in the 6PT to the table, with the prospect of shared security commitments to any agreement, South Korea's participation is probably a foregone conclusion. But both the U.S. and ROK administrations will have to make significant policy changes in order to improve the chances that the NEASDM will promote a secure peace on the Korean peninsula. These changes include:

- Both countries must drop the precondition that North Korea must first completely and verifiably give up its nuclear weapons before any other subject can be discussed.
- South Korea must stop insisting that the North apologize in advance for the *Cheonan* and Pyonyeong incidents and promise not to engage in other provocations. Apologies are important, but often in international relations they come long after the event.<sup>20</sup>
- Both countries must reaffirm the basic agreements reached with North Korea since 1994: the Agreed Framework, the September 2005 joint statement, and the February 2007 joint statement.

- Both countries must suspend joint military exercises for so long as North Korea is positive about negotiations.
- The United States should grant diplomatic recognition to the DPRK and exchange ambassadors with it.

Of course, North Korea also has responsibilities. It must stop engaging in provocative actions against South Korea. It must not test another nuclear weapon or ballistic missile. It must not transfer missile or other weapon components to other states. And it must agree to accept the baseline ideas of full, verifiable denuclearization under international inspection, nonuse of force in settlement of disputes, and engagement with the other parties specified in the three basic documents mentioned above.

These steps amount not only to mutual concessions but also to tests of each side's seriousness of purpose. Yet, they do not really affect the policy independence of any of the parties. They do not, for example, shelve United Nations sanctions on North Korea. They do not impinge on U.S.-ROK defense cooperation, including U.S. military sales to South Korea, the interoperability of the two militaries, and even retaliation in the event of another North Korean attack. U.S.-extended deterrence is also not affected. Nor do these steps prevent trilateral defense cooperation, such as with Japan, though it is important that such cooperation is not pointed directly at China or North Korea. For North Korea, these prior undertakings simply restore the status quo ante 2010, permitting research and development of WMD and missiles until such time as a verifiable dismantlement of these weapons is agreed upon.

Why, then, should the United States and the ROK, as well as the other parties to the 6PT, seek to create a NEASDM? What advantages would this new institution have that would warrant making the kinds of advance promises mentioned above?

### **NEASDM: Functions and Processes**

Multiparty diplomacy in the wake of the Yeonpyeong attack provided the clearest evidence of the need for a mechanism other than the 6PT to address regional security matters. All the parties went into crisis mode.<sup>21</sup> The United States, South Korea, and Japan carried out military exercises in the Yellow Sea and demanded an investigation and then reassurances from North Korea. China at one point called for an emergency meeting of the 6PT; but it also sharply criticized the military



exercises as violations of its exclusive economic zone. ROK-PRC relations became frayed over China's refusal to condemn North Korea's actions and its HEU program, much less accept the need for additional sanctions on Pyongyang.

But what these responses especially made apparent was the inadequacy of the 6PT to deal with a sudden emergency in the region. Reconvening the talks was unacceptable to half the parties unless and until North Korea admitted its responsibility. In the absence of a standing institution able to meet immediately when called upon by one of the parties, the security issues—not just North Korea's use of force, but also the military deployments in the Yellow Sea and UN sanctions—were confined to exchanges of charges and restatements of policy by leaders and foreign ministries. Although, by January 2011, China, South Korea, and Japan had publicly smoothed over their differences and reiterated the need to restore inter-Korean dialogue, nothing of substance had been accomplished that might prevent another incident from occurring. In fact, numerous Chinese-North Korean political and military contacts after Yeonpyeong—including three visits to China by Kim Jong Il in 2011—abundantly demonstrated that China was not about to change its well-established “two-Koreas” policy by pressuring Pyongyang.<sup>22</sup> The Obama-Hu Jintao summit in Washington gave attention to the North Korea situation; but the final joint statement failed to offer specific remedies or a way to get back to the 6PT, and did not even mention the two UN Security Council resolutions on counter-proliferation.<sup>23</sup> Predictably, low-level North-South Korea military talks at Panmunjom in February proved fruitless.

The most critical need for countries in Northeast Asia is an institution designed for crisis prevention, crisis management, and other security-promoting purposes. This SDM would be an outgrowth of the 6PT but would operate independently of it. The Russian Federation, as the country charged by the 6PT with chairing the working group on a regional security mechanism, is best situated to initiate creation of a NEASDM, *whether or not the 6PT resume*. Unlike the 6PT, whose only agenda is a denuclearization arrangement with North Korea, the NEASDM would have an open agenda to accommodate any number and types of security concerns: economic, environmental, energy, and territorial issues, as well as nuclear weapons and alternatives to reliance on them for deterrence.

### ***Functioning of the NEASDM***

The possibility of another sudden escalation of military tensions drives this proposal. *Since there are no outside honest brokers for disputes in Northeast Asia, the essential requirement is organizational: the NEASDM should function as a “circuit breaker,” able to interrupt patterns of escalating confrontation when tensions in the region increase—as is the case now.* Following are some specific suggestions for how the NEASDM might work.

First, all six countries in the 6PT should be members, but no others, although other countries or organizations might be invited to come to participate for a specific session. Second, the NEASDM should be institutionalized, perhaps situated in Beijing or even Panmunjom, with a commitment to meet several times a year at regular intervals regardless of the state of affairs in the region—but with the provision that any of the parties can convene a meeting in a crisis. Third, there should be an understanding among the member-states that the NEASDM meets whether or not all parties are willing to participate so that a boycott by one party cannot prevent the group from meeting. Fourth, the NEASDM's agenda should be unrestricted; the members should be prepared to discuss any issue that any one of them believes is important.

What might a Northeast Asia SDM discuss? Similar to the ASEAN Regional Forum, it would be open to a wide range of political and security issues, such as a code of conduct to govern territorial disputes, military budget transparency, weapons transfers and deployments, terrorism, migrant workers, and piracy. Normalization of DPRK relations with Japan should be a priority. The United States, having already recognized North Korea, might invite it to reiterate their prior pledge (in October 2000, at the time of Vice Marshal Jo Myong Nok's visit to Washington) of “no enmity” or “hostile intent.” These steps would be preliminary to working toward *ending the state of war and signing a peace treaty that all six parties would guarantee.* Providing such a security framework would improve expectations that North Korea would accept international assistance on a scale commensurate with its needs. But “security” is not just a matter for North Korea: The SDM should be open to discussion of human rights, regional environmental, labor, poverty, and public health issues, as well as to measures that support confidence building and trust in the dialogue process itself. The notion of “peace by pieces” comes into play here. To focus talk at the outset on “the North Korean nuclear problem” is probably a non-

starter. The history of international negotiations suggests that tackling the hardest issues first is a recipe for failure. Instead, the starting point for a NEASDM should be concrete projects that bring immediate benefit to the target country (projects that go beyond humanitarian assistance to promote longterm economic development), carry advantages for all the parties, and can build trust—and rely on NGOs with solid credentials to assist in delivery. There are quite a few projects either underway or proposed that fill the bill. For example, Mercy Corps has been working in the DPRK for over a decade, planting apple orchards and creating fisheries. The Nautilus Institute has built wind energy platforms. Two of its standout researchers, Peter Hayes and David von Hippel, have recently suggested a multi-part, safeguarded small light water reactor project in North Korea.<sup>24</sup> A U.S. consortium has been working with the DPRK health ministry since 2008 on tuberculosis treatment and prevention.<sup>25</sup> Educational projects such as the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology and Syracuse University's unique exchange with the DPRK's Kim Chaek University of Technology have successfully delivered computer science training.<sup>26</sup> There are also a number of European educational training programs in business and development management.<sup>27</sup> Over the years a number of proposals have been advanced to construct a gas pipeline extending from Russia and covering both Koreas. For programs and ideas such as these to proliferate, of course, the DPRK would need to live up to its prior commitments on nuclear weapons and become far more transparent about the international assistance it receives.

Many questions must be answered when evaluating a Northeast Asia SDM, however. What kinds of CBMs, for instance, might smooth the way to create a SDM? What should be the core principles of a SDM—for example, refraining from the use of force, promoting transparency in military maneuvers, accepting the diversity and legitimacy of different political and social systems, normalizing relations among all the parties? What can a NEASDM contribute to creating a “permanent peace regime” on the Korean peninsula? How can a NEASDM best be institutionalized, so that the certainty exists that meetings in response to crisis will be held? These are serious issues that can become deal breakers or deal makers.

The kind of SDM envisaged here would bring decided advantages to each party. North Korea would gain legitimacy and the potential for security guarantees sufficient to eliminate its nuclear weapons, if not

immediately then later. Its nuclear weapons would not be the sole object of debate, making its participation easier and avoiding the long-running situation in which multilateral talks are hostage to those weapons. As famine again looms in North Korea, and the Kim Jong Un regime seeks some means of gaining legitimacy, longterm development assistance will be critical. South Korea would gain security from a denuclearized peninsula—or at least a peninsula in which nuclear weapons had been dismantled—and more predictable relations with the North. The ROK would have the opportunity to reduce military spending, which several studies have demonstrated does not produce the same economic benefits that other forms of investment would produce, for example with respect to employment, economic growth, and spinoffs. The emphasis in the defense reform program of the last two South Korean administrations on air and naval forces and imported weapons could be revisited, not only for the potential savings but also with a view to how the country's military modernization might impact Chinese and Japanese security plans.<sup>28</sup> Economic opportunities within a multilateral framework might also open up for South Korea with a NEASDM in place. A full-fledged South Korean development assistance program for North Korea and other countries via the OECD's Development Assistance Committee would be one possibility.<sup>29</sup> Another might be resuscitation of the Tumen River Area Development Program (TRADP) under the UN.

Japan might find the NEASDM a useful way to balance its foreign-policy dependence on the United States while seeking common ground with China and South Korea on territorial issues. Russia, as chair of the 6PT working group on a regional security undertaking, would gain a leadership role in Northeast Asia, as well as enhanced security from agreements on nuclear weapons and territorial differences with Japan.<sup>30</sup> Kim Jong Il's trip to Russia in August 2011, during which he reportedly agreed to a nuclear-weapon moratorium, showed that Moscow's influence remains strong and that its support is still important to the DPRK. For the United States, as discussed below, an opportunity would emerge to reduce its military presence in Northeast Asia and end the longstanding policy of extended nuclear deterrence while expecting improved military transparency from China and North Korea. In fact, the need for forward military alliances and bases, and for nuclear weapons for deterrence, might be significantly reduced if the NEASDM proved successful. Overall, a NEASDM, philosophically committed to common security, might finally bring strategic stability and peaceful

relations to a region that is on the edge.

### ***China the Key***

But China may hold the key to reactivating the 6PT and getting the NEASDM idea off the ground. As Thomas Christensen has recently argued, China's abrasive moves of the last few years—for example, its harassment of U.S. naval ships, its confrontation of Japan over Japan's detention of a Chinese fishing boat captain, and its warning to “outside powers” (i.e., the United States) to stay out of the South China Sea dispute—are rooted in its domestic affairs, specifically sensitivity to nationalist criticism at a time of internal insecurity and great-power aspirations.<sup>31</sup> How to respond to challenging foreign-policy issues such as North Korea's nuclear-weapon program is a matter of intense internal debate in China. Christensen proposes the “the best way to [support Chinese advocates of assertive rather than aggressive policies] is to consistently offer China an active role in multilateral cooperative efforts . . .” The cautious leadership now in charge in Beijing—and the new leadership that will succeed it in 2012—is likely to respond positively to ideas that enhance China's international reputation and avoid the possibility to “ganging up” against it.

For China, the NEASDM ought to be considered preferable to constantly—and incorrectly—being looked to as the controlling influence over North Korea's nuclear and missile programs.<sup>32</sup> A dialogue mechanism, preferably with North Korea at the table, would avoid the charge Chinese nationalists might make that China is selling out North Korea. To the contrary, the SDM would enable Beijing to argue that it is serving both its own and North Korean security interests by participating. NEASDM would also ease Chinese concerns about a sudden eruption of the Korean nuclear situation, for should that happen, U.S.-ROK-Japan security cooperation would surely intensify, probably leading to joint military exercises near Chinese territory, renewed work on a regional missile defense system, and possibly renewed calls in Korea and Japan for going nuclear. NEASDM's success, on the other hand, would give China and Japan a new forum for discussing their disputes and building trust. It might even lay the basis for new trilateral security dialogue groupings to emerge, such as China-U.S.-Japan and China-U.S.-ROK.<sup>33</sup>

A fully institutionalized NEASDM would probably also contribute to greater regional political stability and increased economic opportunities

in the region. China's three northeast provinces—Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning—dominate the country's trade with North Korea. If North Korea were to acknowledge the benefits of regional economic integration, market-based commercial opportunities would magnify not just for China but also for South Korea, Japan, and possibly the United States. Though some specialists have expressed doubts about the pacifying effects of increased economic engagement with North Korea, as well as about China's predominant role in it, others point to China's multi-level approach as offering a model for what might be practiced—especially by large South Korean firms—if engaging the North is a political objective.<sup>34</sup> Getting a foot in the door of the North's coal and mineral resources, dominated up to now by Chinese enterprises, would be one such opportunity for South Korean firms, particularly at a time when the DPRK's trade deficit with China is close to an historic high.<sup>35</sup>

### *A Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone*

One provocative and timely idea that would serve the same purposes as the NEASDM, and could be promoted either inside or outside its framework, is a nuclear-weapon free zone (NWFZ) in all or part of Northeast Asia. The NWFZ is finally getting serious attention, thanks to the efforts of the Nautilus Institute in Berkeley, California, an organization that has made its mark with imaginative ideas for promoting common security in Northeast Asia through energy cooperation. One variation on the NWFZ theme that is especially intriguing is limiting it to the ROK and Japan, with the door held open to later or limited participation by the DPRK.<sup>36</sup> The U.S. role would be pivotal inasmuch as the nuclear threat that Pyongyang has often maintained is directed at it needs to be taken off the table through negative reassurances coupled, perhaps, with Washington's willingness to negotiate a permanent peace simultaneously with progress to resolve fully and verifiably the nuclear issue. Establishing a Korea-Japan NWFZ would have several elements favorable to U.S. and South Korean security needs. It would limit their combined deterrent to conventional forces, which now overwhelmingly favor the ROK military alone but can always be augmented if necessary.<sup>37</sup> And such a zone would promote Korea-Japan military confidence building.

By no longer incorporating nuclear weapons in their deterrent strategy, Washington and Seoul would be acknowledging that such weapons are unusable and in fact contribute to North Korea's embrace of

the nuclear option as its only real source of security. The NWFZ would also reassure North Korea that the ROK and Japan have foreclosed the nuclear option. Conventional deterrence of the North, represented in the U.S.-ROK alliance, would be the chief counter to any DPRK threat. These circumstances would be reassuring to China, and would undermine the rationale for further development of its own nuclear-weapon arsenal. China would be challenged to consider inclusion in the zone. Finally, the zone would put pressure on China to be a more forceful advocate than is now the case for denuclearizing the entire Korean peninsula. In short, a Korea-Japan NWFZ could have the effect of reinstating the abortive 1992 denuclearization accord between the two Koreas.<sup>38</sup>

Although this article has centered on how the ROK and the United States might refocus Northeast Asia security issues away from singular attention to the “North Korea nuclear problem,” there are other ways in which the alliance could enhance international security cooperatively. On the energy and trade fronts, for instance, the ROK could significantly assist the U.S. effort in the Middle East and Africa. As two researchers for the Korea Economic Institute have recently argued, South Korea, as an oil-dependent country with rapidly growing exports to the Middle East and Africa, has a strong interest in the political stability of those regions. Korea also has the kinds of technical, financial, and construction resources, development experience, and domestic market that some of the developing economies in those regions badly need.<sup>39</sup> This would be especially the case for countries such as Tunisia and Egypt that are now going through a difficult transition to more open and accountable political systems while trying to create jobs for their volatile young populations.

Official development assistance (ODA) and “green growth” are related areas in which Korea can contribute in Third World countries, specifically with respect to human development. Until now, Korea has not been an important player in ODA, providing (at around \$580 million in 2009) less than the OECD average in relation to national income and only a little more than Taiwan.<sup>40</sup> Yet by targeting aid to human development purposes such as health care, clean water, and sanitation, Korean assistance may make a meaningful impact even without a major increase in amount. In like manner, Korea might take more initiatives to promote President Lee’s green growth commitment of 2008 abroad. At the same time as it might become a model of a low-carbon society, Korea

could use its ODA and its human and technical resources to support energy efficiency and conservation abroad. Its accomplishments in solar and wind power also warrant sharing with developing economies, perhaps—and despite the competitive issue when it comes to exporting clean energy technology—in cooperation with U.S. firms.<sup>41</sup>

Given the unpopularity of the United States in Muslim countries and in many other parts of the developing world, South Korea, working alone, through the G-20, or alongside the United States, has an opportunity to play the bridging role it has often talked about—and in ways that will be helpful to promoting political stability and democratization alongside economic growth.

## **Conclusion**

Although this article has centered on how the ROK and the United States might refocus Northeast Asia security issues away from singular attention to the “North Korea nuclear problem,” there are other ways in which the alliance could enhance international security cooperatively. On the energy and trade fronts, for instance, the ROK could significantly assist the U.S. effort in the Middle East and Africa. As two researchers for the Korea Economic Institute have recently argued, South Korea, as an oil-dependent country with rapidly growing exports to the Middle East and Africa, has a strong interest in the political stability of those regions. Korea also has the kinds of technical, financial, and construction resources, development experience, and domestic market that some of the developing economies in those regions badly need.<sup>42</sup> This would be especially the case for countries such as Tunisia and Egypt that are now going through a difficult transition to more open and accountable political systems while trying to create jobs for their volatile young populations.

Official development assistance (ODA) and “green growth” are related areas in which Korea can contribute in Third World countries, specifically with respect to human development. Until now, Korea has not been an important player in ODA, providing (at around \$580 million in 2009) less than the OECD average in relation to national income and only a little more than Taiwan.<sup>43</sup> Yet by targeting aid to human development purposes such as health care, clean water, and sanitation, Korean assistance may make a meaningful impact even without a major increase in amount. In like manner, Korea might take more initiatives to promote President Lee’s green growth commitment of 2008 abroad. At



the same time as it might become a model of a low-carbon society, Korea could use its ODA and its human and technical resources to support energy efficiency and conservation abroad. Its accomplishments in solar and wind power also warrant sharing with developing economies, perhaps—and despite the competitive issue when it comes to exporting clean energy technology—in cooperation with U.S. firms.<sup>44</sup>

Given the unpopularity of the United States in Muslim countries and in many other parts of the developing world, South Korea, working alone, through the G-20, or alongside the United States, has an opportunity to play the bridging role it has often talked about—and in ways that will be helpful to promoting political stability and democratization alongside economic growth.

## Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> See the interview of Moon Chung-In in *Hankyoreh*, November 7, 2008, at [http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_international/320468.html](http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/320468.html).

<sup>2</sup> See Mel Gurtov, “The Korea-U.S. Alliance in the Obama Era,” *International Journal of Korean Studies*, vol. 13, No. 2 (Fall-Winter, 2009), pp. 43-69 as well as U.S. Embassy-Seoul cables reporting South Korean government views at [www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/243557](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/243557) (January 4, 2010) and [www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/249859](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/249859) (February 22, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Chinese commentaries have said the United States needs to learn to “live within its means” and “cure its addiction to debts.” Some senior figures in Beijing apparently have questioned the huge (\$1.1 trillion) Chinese stake in U.S. securities. But for most, the key issue is the impact of U.S. debt on China’s and the world’s economy. See Edward Wong, “U.S. Economic Woes Loom Over Biden Visit to China,” *New York Times*, August 14, 2011, p. A11.

<sup>4</sup> The 2011 Japan defense white paper drew harsh Chinese comments because it depicted PRC naval and air activity in East Asia as designed to extend a sphere of influence. See “Japan Under Fire for ‘China Threat Theory,’” *China Daily*, August 5, 2011, at [www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-08/05/content\\_13053774.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-08/05/content_13053774.htm).

<sup>5</sup> The quote was by Nagashima Akihisa, a former vice minister of defense. On American dissatisfaction with Japan’s handling of the crisis, see Norimitsu Onishi and Martin Fackler, “In Nuclear Crisis, Crippling Mistrust,” *New York Times*, June 13, 2011, p. 1.

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<sup>6</sup> The coincidence of Russian and Chinese views on the Korea situation, including criticism of U.S. policy toward the DPRK, is clearly shown in an article by one of Russia's top Korea specialists, Alexander Vorontsov, "The Russian Perspective on the Korean Peninsula in 2010 and Implications for the Future," originally published in *New Eastern Outlook*, March 15, 2011, and reprinted [http://nautilus.org/publications/essays/napsnet/forum/11-07\\_Vorontsov](http://nautilus.org/publications/essays/napsnet/forum/11-07_Vorontsov) (April 1, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> These are the findings of Isak Svensson, "East Asian Peacemaking: Exploring the Patterns of Conflict Management and Conflict Settlement in East Asia," *Asian Perspective*, vol. 35, No. 2 (2011), pp. 163-185.

<sup>8</sup> See Avery Goldstein and Edward D. Mansfield, "When Fighting Ends," *Global Asia*, vol. 6, No.2 (Summer, 2011), pp. 9-15.

<sup>9</sup> David C. Kang, "The Security of Northeast Asia," *Pacific Focus*, vol. 24, No. 1 (April, 2009), p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Pritchard, "Time for a Comprehensive, Proactive North Korea Policy," Center for U.S.-Korea Policy *Newsletter*, vol. 3, No. 3 (March, 2011), online.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Nicholas Eberstadt, "6-Party Trap," May 19, 2011, at <http://nautilus.org/publications/essays/napsnet/forum/6-party-trap-Eberstadt/#ii-article-by-nicholas>. Eberstadt is convinced that the North Koreans will demand termination of the U.S.-ROK and U.S.-Japan alliances as conditions for its denuclearization, but such worst-case thinking is no excuse for not testing the North Koreans at the bargaining table.

<sup>12</sup> "North Korea first needs to take concrete steps to demonstrate a change of behavior," said Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. The tripartite statement said: "'Resumption of the six-party talks will require the [North Koreans] to make sincere efforts to improve relations with the (South) as well as taking concrete steps to demonstrate a genuine commitment to complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization.'" Quotations from *USA Today* at [www.usatoday.com/news/world/2010-12-06-korea-clinton\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2010-12-06-korea-clinton_N.htm)

<sup>13</sup> For a very fair-minded assessment, see the speech by Lt.-General Robert Gard (ret.), "Negotiating with North Korea on its Nuclear Program," April 28, 2011, at [http://armscontrolcenter.org/policy/northkorea/articles/negotiating\\_with\\_north\\_korea\\_on\\_its\\_nuclear\\_program/](http://armscontrolcenter.org/policy/northkorea/articles/negotiating_with_north_korea_on_its_nuclear_program/). My thanks to Prof. J. J. Suh for bringing this speech to my attention.

<sup>14</sup> See Scott Snyder, "Prospects for a Northeast Asia Security Framework," Korea Economic Institute conference paper, 2008, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> For an assessment of Lee's green-growth initiatives, see Jill Kosch O'Donnell, "Korea's 97 Billion Dollar Question: What is Green Growth?" Center for U.S.-

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Korea Policy (Asia Foundation) Newsletter, vol. 3, No. 6 (2011).

<sup>16</sup> See Hyeron Jo and Jongryn Mo, “Does the United States Need a New East Asian Anchor?: A Case for US-Japan-Korea Trilateralism,” Asia Foundation paper at <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/MoUSJapanKorea.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Kurt M. Campbell et al., *Going Global: The Future of the U.S.-South Korea Alliance* (Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, February 2009); Scott Snyder, *Pursuing a Comprehensive Vision for the U.S.-South Korea Alliance* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Text at [www.voanews.com/uspolicy/2009-06-23-voa2.cfm](http://www.voanews.com/uspolicy/2009-06-23-voa2.cfm)

<sup>19</sup> See Patrick M. Morgan, “American Grand Strategy and the US-ROK Alliance,” *Pacific Focus*, vol 24, No. 1 (April, 2009), pp. 22-42.

<sup>20</sup> Among many examples are Kim Jong Il’s apology to Japan for the abduction of Japanese citizens and Bill Clinton’s apology to the Rwandan people for the failure to act to prevent the genocide of 1994.

<sup>21</sup> On the background, see Scott Snyder and See-won Byun, “DPRK Provocations Test China’s Regional Role,” *Comparative Connections*, January 2011, online at [http://csis.org/files/publication/1004qchina\\_korea.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/1004qchina_korea.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> The belief that China holds the key to resolving the North Korea nuclear issue is constantly stated by U.S. officials and upheld with equal fervor by many Korea specialists. See, in the latter instance, the Council on Foreign Relations Independent Task Force Report No. 64, *U.S. Policy Toward the Korean Peninsula* (June, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> Point 18 of the Joint Statement (January 19, 2011) contains a fair number of generalities regarding Korean security, such as the hope for improved inter-Korean dialogue, support of denuclearization, “concern” about North Korea’s “claimed” HEU program, and support of “early resumption” of the 6PT. Text at [www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/01/19/us-china-joint-statement#main-content](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/01/19/us-china-joint-statement#main-content)

<sup>24</sup> They suggest the project would be able to deliver electricity cheaply, bring in South Korea, Russian, and Chinese technology, and enmesh North Korea in a regional enrichment consortium that would also have Japanese participation. See their “Engaging the DPRK Enrichment and Small LWR Program: What Would It Take?” (February, 2011), at [ww.nautilus.org/publications/essays/napsnet/reports/vonHippelHayesLWR.pdf](http://ww.nautilus.org/publications/essays/napsnet/reports/vonHippelHayesLWR.pdf).

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<sup>25</sup> The DPRK Tuberculosis Project brings together the Stanford University School of Medicine, Christian Friends of Korea, and the Nuclear Threat Initiative, among other organizations.

<sup>26</sup> Asia Society Center on U.S.-China Relations and University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, *North Korea Inside Out: The Case for Economic Engagement* (October, 2009), p. 31; Hyunjin Seo and Stuart Thorson, "Academic Science Engagement with North Korea," Korea Economic Institute, ed., *On Korea 2010*, Academic Paper Series, vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: KEI, 2010), pp. 105-121.

<sup>27</sup> JinPark and Seung-Ho Jung, "Ten Years of Knowledge Partnership with North Korea," *Asian Perspective*, vol. 31, No. 2 (2007), pp. 75-93.

<sup>28</sup> See the excellent study by John Feffer, "Ploughshares into Swords: Economic Implications of South Korean Military Spending," in Korea Economic Institute, ed., *On Korea 2010*, pp. 1-22.

<sup>29</sup> See Anthea Mulakala, "Development Cooperation and Aid Effectiveness in Asia," Asia Foundation Notes from the Field (January 19, 2011), at <http://asiafoundation.org/in-asia/category/notes-from-the-field/> South Korea will be the first Asian country to host a meeting of the OECD-DAC's Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF4) in Pusan in November 2011.

<sup>30</sup> The Russian view, as articulated by Alexander Vorontsov ("The Russian Perspective on the Korean Peninsula") is that the 6PT is "a perfectly workable tool that has provided a store of solid useful experience. Therefore, it would be extremely desirable to start the talks as soon as possible. However, it naturally would be impossible to exclude the emergence of other international structures to deal with similar problems in the future."

<sup>31</sup> Thomas J. Christensen, "The Advantages of an Assertive China: Responding to Beijing's Abrasive Diplomacy," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 90, No. 2 (March-April, 2011), pp. 54-67.

<sup>32</sup> Most recently, at the same time Admiral Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was in China to ask for its assistance in pressuring North Korea, top PRC officials were hosting North Korean officials to help celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the PRC-DPRK Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance. Reportedly, China's commitment to defense of North Korea under article 2 of the treaty was reaffirmed. See "Hu Hails Friendly Ties with DPRK," *China Daily* (Beijing), July 12, 2011 at [www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2011-07/12/content\\_12880774.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2011-07/12/content_12880774.htm).

<sup>33</sup> Snyder, "Prospects for a Northeast Asia Security Framework," p. 6.

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<sup>34</sup> In support of economic engagement, see Mika Marumoto, “The Roles of China and South Korea in North Korean Economic Change,” in Korea Economic Institute and Korea Institute for International Economic Policy, *Korea’s Economy 2008*, vol. 24 (2008), pp. 92-105. Among the doubters are Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, “North Korea’s Economic Development and External Relations,” *ibid.*, pp. 83-91. Both these analyses agree that the trend is for Chinese transactions with North Korea to be on a commercial basis and South Korea’s on noncommercial terms or government aid. Haggard and Noland acknowledge, in agreement with Marumoto, that “the North Korean economy [has reoriented] toward trading and investment partners that are more favorably disposed toward a strategy of engagement.” But South Korean practices under Lee put the ROK at a disadvantage compared with China.

<sup>35</sup> See Nathaniel Aden, “North Korean Trade with China as Reported in Chinese Customs Statistics: 1995-2009 Energy and Minerals Trends and Implications,” Nautilus Institute Special Report, June 8, 2011, at [http://nautilus.org/publications/essays/napsnet/reports/DPRK\\_PRC\\_Trade\\_Aden](http://nautilus.org/publications/essays/napsnet/reports/DPRK_PRC_Trade_Aden) Aden puts the trade deficit (for 2008) at around \$1.8 billion

<sup>36</sup> Peter Hayes and Scott Bruce, “North Korean Nuclear Nationalism and the Threat of Nuclear War in Korea,” NAPSNet Special Report, April 21, 2011, at [http://nautilus.org/publications/essays/napsnet/forum/11-09\\_Hayes\\_Bruce](http://nautilus.org/publications/essays/napsnet/forum/11-09_Hayes_Bruce).

<sup>37</sup> Peter Hayes, “North-South Korean Elements of National Power,” NAPSNet Special Report, April 20, 2011, at [www.nautilus.org/publications/essays/napsnet/reports/north-south-hayes](http://www.nautilus.org/publications/essays/napsnet/reports/north-south-hayes).

<sup>38</sup> Gary Samore, President Obama’s principal adviser on nuclear weapons, made an unfortunate suggestion in June 2011 that the United States, if requested by South Korea, should reintroduce nuclear weapons to the ROK. Some South Korean legislators evidently support that idea. Needless to say, the analysis here suggests that nothing could be more destabilizing than a redeployment of nuclear weapons to the Korean peninsula. Samore’s notion that redeployment would prompt China to press North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons profoundly misunderstands Chinese thinking on Korean affairs. Far more likely is that China would be compelled to support North Korean resistance to making any concession on its nuclear weapons capability, and would harden the stance of those Chinese analysts who believe “American hegemony” must be forcefully confronted.

<sup>39</sup> Troy Stangarone and Greg Scarlatoiu, “After the Arab Spring: A Role for Northeast Asia?” *Global Asia*, vol. 6, No. 2 (Summer, 2011), pp. 74-80.

<sup>40</sup> Greg Scarlatoiu, “Practical Suggestions for Korea’s Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) Blueprint,” *The KEI Exchange*, Korea Economic Institute of America, 2011.

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<sup>41</sup> See Jill Kosch O'Donnell, "Korea's 97 Billion Dollar Question: What is Green Growth?" *Center for U.S.-Korea Policy Newsletter* (Asia Foundation), vol. 3, No. 6 (2011).

<sup>42</sup> Troy Stangarone and Greg Scarlatoiu, "After the Arab Spring: A Role for Northeast Asia?" *Global Asia*, vol. 6, No. 2 (Summer, 2011), pp. 74-80.

<sup>43</sup> Greg Scarlatoiu, "Practical Suggestions for Korea's Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) Blueprint," *The KEI Exchange*, Korea Economic Institute of America, 2011.

<sup>44</sup> See Jill Kosch O'Donnell, "Korea's 97 Billion Dollar Question: What is Green Growth?" *Center for U.S.-Korea Policy Newsletter* (Asia Foundation), vol. 3, No. 6 (2011).