

KAS-Schriftenreihe China
德国阿登纳基金会系列丛书

Exploration of a Northeast Asian Security Architecture: Issues and Solutions

MG. Pan Zhenqiang (Retired)



Konrad
Adenauer
Stiftung

德国阿登纳基金会

No. 87 (en)
Beijing 2009

Editor:

Project Office of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in the PRC
Office C 813, Beijing Lufthansa Center
No. 50 Liangmaqiao Road, Chaoyang District, Beijing 100125

Tel: 0086-10 6462 2207 / 08

Fax: 0086-10 6462 2209

E-mail: beijing@kas.de

Webpage: www.kas.de/china

Responsible:

Wolfgang Meyer

The contents and views expressed in this publication are entirely the responsibility of the author(s), and do not necessarily represent the positions of the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation.

发行：德国阿登纳基金会中国项目执行人

地址：北京市朝阳区亮马桥路50号燕莎中心写字楼C813室

邮编：100125

电话：0086-10 6462 2207 / 08

传真：0086-10 6462 2209

E-mail: beijing@kas.de

主页：www.kas.de/china

主编：梅视

文章内容仅代表笔者之观点，与阿登纳基金会立场无关。

KAS-Schriftenreihe China
德国阿登纳基金会系列丛书

Exploration of a Northeast Asian Security Architecture: Issues and Solutions

MG. Pan Zhenqiang (Retired)

No. 87 (en)
Beijing 2009

Exploration of a Northeast Asian Security Architecture: Issues and Solutions

MG. Pan Zhenqiang (Retired)

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way."

Charles Dickens

A Tale of Two Cities (1859)

Introduction

One wonders if the above lines from Dickens could be usefully applied to the current situation in Northeast Asia, for the region has been such a mixed story in the past few years that people may tend to portray it "for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only". Indeed, many positive developments are emerging that, combined, point to the welcome prospect of peace, stability and co-prosperity based on dynamic multilateral cooperation throughout the region in the future. On the other hand, however, this cherished goal is far from certain. The horizon is littered with many obstacles which, if mishandled or neglected, could

generate further mistrust and even hostility in any set of bilateral relationships among the major players, throwing regional multilateralism off track. Nowhere are these seemingly conflicting trends manifested more clearly than in the difficulty of the implementation of a security architecture which would ensure peace, security and prosperity for all the nations in Northeast Asia. Will it be possible and feasible to build an enduring architecture of this type based on the multilateral cooperation of all the nations in the region? Or is the region doomed to run into increasing suspicion, conflicting national interests, and inevitable military conflicts among nations? The present paper attempts to evaluate the prospect of the future building of a security archi-

ture in Northeast Asia. It first analyzes the current security environment of the region, which will clearly have an important influence on the shaping of any subsequent security architecture. It then attempts to define the major issues that have to be addressed in the process of furthering regional multilateralism. Finally, it offers some advice as to how the model of European regional integration could contribute to a similar undertaking in an Asian context. The paper concludes with several observations regarding the future prospects security architecture building in Northeast Asia.

The changing strategic situation in Northeast Asia

The end of the Cold War has caused dramatic changes in the strategic landscape of Northeast Asia.

On the positive side, peace and development have become the general trend in the region. This trend has been particularly evident since the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States. While many parts of the world have become embroiled in new turbulence and instability, Northeast Asia seems to have remained a bright spot where peace and stability generally prevail. The post-Cold War world environment has enlarged rather than reduced the space for the various nations in Northeast Asia to engage in political and security cooperation. Nations in the region have found greater common ground in their strategic interests, leading to a shared desire to work together to address security problems that no nation can single-handedly manage, and work through their differences with peaceful consultations.

One indication of this climate of cooperation has been the establishment of various bilateral dialogue mechanisms among these states. Against this backdrop, Sino-American relations are seen to be enjoying their most productive period since the end of the Cold War. China and Russia have developed a strategic partnership based on a sound political understanding. China and Japan have taken measures to repair their much damaged bilateral relations thanks to the change of the leadership in Tokyo since 2006. In short, there seems a strong trend of mutual interdependence and mutual constraint among these players, in which situation no single power or power group is able to enjoy complete freedom in their actions at the expense of the core interests of others. Thus, it can be argued that Northeast Asia is indeed a region in which the development of a benign trend of multi-polarization has been most witnessed in the various parts of the world in recent years.

The positive evolution of the strategic and political situation has also provided more propitious conditions for the region to focus on economic development. The region has succeeded in ensuring sustained high economic growth in most countries over the past two decades. In this regard, the rapid development of China is the most notable feature. As a result of this economic development, China's overall national strength has increased significantly. Thanks to the huge regional momentum engendered by the development of China, the whole of East Asia, including Northeast Asia, has once again emerged as the most dynamic region of economic development in the world since the 1997 financial crisis.

To ensure continued economic development, nations in the region have also felt a great need to strengthen regional cooperation. This is a logical result of their efforts to cope with the negative impacts of globalization. For over a decade, Northeast Asia has been witnessing a rapid strengthening of regional cooperation, particularly in terms of growing economic interdependence. For the first time in modern history, the nations of Northeast Asia have come together voluntarily to seek the best way to cooperate in a shared vision that, by pooling their huge potentials of human, natural and economic resources, can better tackle their common problems and strengthen peace, prosperity and security. It is also their common conviction that the development of regionalism may well lead to the building of a community in East Asia which will not only dramatically upgrade the competitiveness of East Asia as a collective entity vis-à-vis other parts of the world, but also will ultimately create a more favorable global security landscape.

Thanks to the concerted efforts of countries in the region, various forms of multilateral cooperation have undergone initial but important progress. Starting from 1997, Northeast Asian countries joined cooperation with Southeast Asian countries, establishing a whole series of cooperative mechanisms with the ASEAN community. These institutionalized efforts at an annual basis include 10 plus 3 (ten ASEAN countries plus China, Japan and the ROK) dialogue, 10 plus 1 dialogues (ten ASEAN countries plus China, Japan, and the ROK independently), and trilateral dialogues between China, Japan and South Korea. All these have not only helped deepen economic interdependence and political mutual trust, but they have also strengthened the ability of the respective nations to meet the

challenges of globalization. They have also provided new impetus to the positive interaction of major powers in the Asia-Pacific.

The inspiring development of the situation in Northeast Asia does not suggest, of course, that this region is free of any security problems. While the overall security environment in the Asia-Pacific region remains stable, challenges to the peace and stability of Northeast Asia abound.

First of all, the recent positive developments on the Korean Peninsula are still precarious and too fragile to fundamentally change the structure of military confrontation along the 38th Parallel Line. Although the Cold War itself has been consigned to history for almost two decades, the peninsula remains one of the few major relics of that period in the world today. The Korean War, which took place over half a century ago, has, in theory, still not ended as there has been only an armistice in place. Thus, with the possibility of the resumption of military actions, the warring sides continue to deploy troops along both sides of the 38th Parallel Line, (except for the Chinese Volunteer troops who were withdrawn to their own territory by 1958), poised on hair-trigger alert for a new round of military conflict. The danger has been further reinforced by the dramatic transformation of the strategic environment of Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula in particular. No longer is there a bifurcated structure in the region as there was during the Cold War. On the peninsula, the balance between the North and South, each being backed up by its allies, has totally changed. The South has developed rapidly as a modern, prosperous and influential player while the North has been reduced to isolation, plagued by increasing mili-

tary pressure from outside, and a severe economic predicament at home coupled with a paranoid mindset towards its security.

Secondly, the region has continued to register many inter-state disputes involving different territorial claims or conflicting maritime interests. As all these disputes concern the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the parties involved, it has been very difficult, if not impossible, to reach satisfactory sustained solutions so far. Although a major war in Northeast Asia is highly unlikely, the possibility that these disputes be accelerated into military conflicts cannot be ruled out.

Thirdly, the region, like other parts of the world, is also running the risk of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and international terrorism. The DPRK nuclear crisis is a case in point of the former; while the increased terrorist activities of East Turkistan separatists against China are a tangible example of the latter. What compounds the complexity of the situation in the region is that nations do not always share their views as how to best address these types of threat. The challenge, therefore, is whether solidarity among all the nations in the region can be maintained and consolidated so as to unite them to address these emerging issues.

Fourthly, to better protect their own security interests, nations in the region are taking measures to strengthen their military capabilities in the name of hedging against future uncertainties. Often, however, one state's hedging measures are conveniently interpreted by others as provocations. Thus, there are already signs of a vicious cycle of measures and counter-measures in operation, which could well be a source of a

regional arms race in the future.

Fifthly, the region is yet to establish effective security and economic mechanisms on the one hand to better promote cooperation and on the other to better manage any crisis should it occur. No one argues against the desirability of such multilateral regional security and economic mechanisms. However, owing to the great diversity of the region, there seem to be vast and basic differences of sentiment as to how these mechanisms should be conceptualized in a way that is acceptable to all the nations concerned. In this aspect, one of the major bones of contention is the status and role of the US-led military alliances in the future security equation in Northeast Asia. The US and its allies have advocated that the alliance system should continue to serve as the central underlying tenet of any future security architecture, but not all nations agree. In China's view, the development of military alliances is not necessarily conducive to the development of more benign major power relations in Northeast Asia. They will most likely bring more negative rather than positive impacts to the security of the whole region. In economic terms, for all the progress of regionalism in Northeast Asia, total regional economic integration is still a far cry from reality. There is no consensus with regard to the definition, scope of cooperation, and selecting the 'right' participants for such integration, let alone a pan-regional cooperative structure for community building. Obviously, finding resolutions for these problems is no easy task.

Sixthly, many countries in the region are experiencing significant transformations of their economic and social structures in order to maintain

dynamic economic development and social progress. Many more drastic economic and social reforms would be involved in any further integration, and whether they would be able to succeed is far from certain. This uncertainty could present a more fundamental risk for all the nations in Northeast Asia, for better or worse. Success in these efforts will go a long way towards sustaining economic development and strengthening the domestic social stability in these individual nations. However, on the other hand, failure in these efforts will result in unpredictable consequences, possibly including economic depression, social turmoil, and erosion of the credibility of national governments. Either trend could have significant impacts on the security in Northeast Asia.

Last but by no means least, underpinning all these challenges is the uncertain nature of the future evolution of relations between major powers in the region. The key question for the region in the future is whether or not the policy orientations of these nations will eventually contribute to the shaping of sustained cooperative partnerships between them based on equality, mutual trust and benefit, and mutual respect. The outcome, again, will have significant influence on regional security structures as well peace, stability and prosperity. Again, the answer is far from certain: despite the fact that these nations enjoy more or less normal and working relations today, cooperation among them is based on an ad hoc or expediency basis, vulnerable to changes over time. Deep-rooted suspicion and mistrust still remain in almost every set of bilateral relationships among these powers, and have the potential to become the major obstacle to future developments of the relations between major regional powers.

Issues in Security architecture Building in Northeast Asia

Seen in this light, Northeast Asia is at a crossroads. This is particularly so when most major countries in the region seem to be entering a phase of governmental change. In some ways, this presents a golden window of opportunity for these nations to reflect on policy in a more fundamental and systematic way. There is a high expectation that readjustments will be forthcoming.

In the meantime, all nations in the region wish to have a more favorable international environment based on cooperative regional multilateralism so as to best protect their own security. To build a more institutionalized security architecture in Northeast Asia has become a common goal for all the countries in the region. So far, a broad initial consensus seems to have been achieved, which includes, inter alia, the following:

1. The future security architecture of Northeast Asia will first have at its core the Korean Peninsula at peace. Pending that, there would be no security architecture to speak of in the region.
2. To that end, the top priority on the agenda of the security architecture building in Northeast Asia is a sustainable solution of the DPRK nuclear crisis. However, the solution of the nuclear crisis is only the start of the peace process. Equally significant is establishing the mechanisms of lasting peace on the Peninsula, drawing on the solution of (or at least a breakthrough in) the nuclear crisis. This peace mechanism should not only provide strong in-

centives for the eventual peaceful unification of the two Koreas, but also satisfy the core security interests of the major powers in the region.

3. Six-Party Talks could be the most ideal venue not only for the solution of the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula, but also for establishing the practical framework for any security architecture in Northeast Asia, acceptable to all nations in the region.
4. Other than those on the Korean Peninsula, there are also other important security issues to address, including the role of military alliances in Northeast Asia, the solution of the Taiwan question, and the peaceful solution of territorial and maritime disputes, and so on. Solutions to these issues will also constitute inherent building blocks for the security architecture in Northeast Asia.

Solution of the DPRK nuclear crisis as the prerequisite for a sustained and effective security architecture in Northeast Asia

The reason why the solution of the DPRK nuclear crisis has become a prerequisite for the Northeast Asian security architecture is because the issue is not merely a nuclear issue per se. If one considers it within the larger political, economic and military context of the region, the nuclear issue is also an indicative example of all the potential contradictions and conflicts in the relations of the major players on the peninsula. It is, in particular, an extension of the confrontation between North Korea and the United States. To put it another way, whether the issue can be brought to a satisfactory end will have far-reaching implications for the security of the

whole of Northeast Asia and the peninsula in particular.

The current DPRK nuclear crisis has been ongoing since 2003. Although impressive progress towards the goal of denuclearization is being made through the work of the Six-Party Talks, the future still holds many uncertainties. But to better appreciate the DPRK nuclear issue, it is perhaps helpful to offer a brief review of its history.

It is now quite clear that North Korea's nuclear ambitions have existed for a long time, and its progress towards this goal has been affected by the changing domestic and international situation in that time. Pyongyang started a nuclear program in the early 1960s with a small research reactor of 5 megawatts (5 MW) at Yongbyon capable of producing plutonium. In the 1980s, the severe energy shortage in North Korea led to an agreement to import nuclear reactors and oil from the USSR, with a condition that North Korea must sign the NPT, which the DPRK accepted with great reluctance. After many years' hesitance, Pyongyang signed the NPT in 1985, but most probably reserving its nuclear option. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rapid subsequent change of the security environment around North Korea in the post-Cold War era, Pyongyang started construction of two reactors, rated at respectively 50MW and 200MW, chiefly by relying on its own technology, apparently in an attempt to accelerate its nuclear weapon program under the guise of peaceful use of nuclear energy. In 1992, the country signed a safeguard agreement with IAEA under heavy international pressure. Consequent inspections resulted in a rift between the DPRK and IAEA on the verification of North Korea's nuclear

sites. Amid demands for special inspections, North Korea announced its intention to withdraw from the NPT in 1993. Hence a first nuclear crisis emerged on the peninsula. But the crisis was quickly resolved in 1994 when the United States and North Korea signed the Agreed Framework, under which Pyongyang committed to freezing its plutonium program in exchange for two proliferation-resistant nuclear reactors and additional aid.

Seen with hindsight, the Agreed Framework clearly played a positive role in halting North Korea's nuclear development program in terms of existing material and facilities. As one estimate stated: "(i)f you look at the outcome of the Agreed Framework, you see that a North Korean nuclear weapons program based on plutonium was stopped. If we had not negotiated and had not otherwise stopped the program, it would have produced by now at least 100 nuclear weapons."¹ It seemed also to testify to the strategic intentions of North Korea regarding its nuclear program. Pyongyang seemed willing to broker a deal with the United States for its nuclear assets in return for greater security; that is, to ensure the survival of the regime, and create a more favorable international environment for its domestic development.

The Agreed Framework generated additional political benefits. In subsequent years, North Korea showed considerable good faith in improving political relations with the outside, including

South Korea, Western countries, and the United States in particular. Pyongyang had also demonstrated its willingness to curb its nuclear and missile programs particularly when the US, South Korea and its allies agreed to take into consideration North Korea's security concerns and to provide economic assistance. Additional dynamism was added to this trend when Kim Dae-jung became president of South Korea in 1997. He immediately initiated the Sunshine Policy towards North Korea. The two Koreas achieved a historical breakthrough in the decades-long impasse in their relations as the result of the summit meeting of the two countries in 2000. Meanwhile, North Korea showed more signs of initiating reforms at home and opening up to the outside world, albeit in a cautious manner. Washington also succeeded in securing a moratorium by Pyongyang on its missile test program. By the last months of the Clinton administration, unprecedented exchanges of high level visits took place with an explicit demonstration of good political will from both sides. The two countries had come so close to each other that there was even the suggestion of a ray of hope for a larger breakthrough in bilateral relations.

However, it should be mentioned that the Agreed Framework had, unsurprisingly, serious flaws. Produced as an expedient solution to an imminent nonproliferation problem rather than as a sustainable building block for long-term peace and security in the region, it was obviously too weak to reduce suspicions and resolve funda-

1 Robert Gallucci, Dean at the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University and former Ambassador-at-Large in the US Department of State and chief negotiator of the Agreed Framework, "Nuclear Confrontation with North Korea: Lessons of the 1994 Crisis for Today", Center for Strategic and International Studies and Co-sponsored by Ilmin International Relations Institute, Korea University and Dong-A Ilbo, May 6, 2003, http://www.csis.org/isp/crisis_peninsula/seoulRTtranscript.pdf

mental differences between the US and North Korea. In the first place, the Agreed Framework seemed to focus on the freeze rather than elimination of North Korea's existing plutonium material and facilities, and it did not extend to Pyongyang's possible other new programs. This so-called incompleteness has become the focal point of the attack against the Agreed Framework by the hardliners in the US, who complained that this "loophole" had provided opportunity to the DPRK to start its uranium enrichment program. Problems had been further compounded by an apparent underestimation of the engineering and financial difficulties in the building of the two light water reactors. The target date of the completion of first such a reactor was 2003, but this was soon found to be an impossible deadline. The project of building the light water reactors proceeded much more slowly than stipulated under the accord.

All these problems became sources of impatience, suspicions and accusations from both sides. But, even if they remained of technical nature, political constraints, especially from the US side, seem to have caused lasting damage, leading to the final collapse of the Agreed Framework and the resumption of hostilities on the peninsula. At the very outset, the agreement was attacked on a political level by neo-conservatives in the United States for the nature of its "appeasement to the North". The criticism was further reinforced when the Republicans gained control of the Congress in the 1994 midterm elections, thus greatly restraining the actions of the Clinton administration.

The Bush administration came into power in 2001, which at once terminated virtually all the ongoing positive developments in the Korean Peninsula under the pretext of the need to conduct a review of US policy towards North Korea. Unlike its predecessor, which took North Korea as an interlocutor, the Bush administration appeared to view Pyongyang more as a dangerous threat which needed to be eliminated. The new administration also questioned the validity of its predecessor's negotiating approach of "appeasement" to North Korea, arguing it could hardly achieve the US strategic objective of preventing Pyongyang from acquiring nuclear and long range missile capabilities. With such a mindset, the Bush administration announced on June 6, 2001 "a comprehensive approach to Pyongyang, which should be more accurately described as "a benign negligence policy".²

Following this, the 9/11 terrorist attacks occurred, which not only dramatically changed the threat perception and security strategy of the Bush administration, but also, somewhat surprisingly, strengthened Washington's determination to see North Korea as a threat and George W. Bush formally labeled North Korea as part of the "axis of evil" in the 2002 State of the Union address. The situation was even further exacerbated when, in a bilateral talk with Pyongyang in October 2002, the Bush administration suddenly accused North Korea of having pursued a secret highly enriched uranium (HEU) program, and stressed that it would not enter into further talks unless North Korea renounce this program, and provide adequate verification

2 Alex Wagner, "Bush Outlines Terms For Resuming Talks With North Korea", Arms Control Today, July/August, 2001, http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2001_07-08/northkoreajul_aug01.asp

thereof. North Korea vehemently denied the US accusation. No one outside really knows what passed during this acrimonious exchange. One thing is clear though, that is, the new confrontation immediately set off a new round of action and reaction in such a dizzying manner that they quickly unraveled the Agreed Framework and effectively regressed relations back to Cold War levels. On November 14, the US halted heavy fuel oil shipment to North Korea, which the North felt to be the only part of the Agreed Framework that Washington had actually fulfilled. In response, North Korea announced in December that it would immediately lift a freeze on a nuclear reactor that had been mothballed since the 1994 agreement. A few days later, Pyongyang removed all the monitoring devices of the IAEA at Yongbyon nuclear plant, and asked its inspectors to leave the country. The new year of 2002 saw other alarming announcements from the North, including its immediate withdrawal from the NPT, as well as the nullifying of self-restraints for missile tests. In April, North Korean officials declared that it had already possessed a nuclear arsenal, and had started plutonium separation from its 8,000 spent fuel rods.³

In the meantime, both the US and DPRK were intensifying their military postures in preparation for war. The Bush administration announced a plan to send reinforcement troops in North-east Asia. It repeatedly stressed that although it had no plans to attack the North, all the options were open, which clearly meant that it did

not rule out a military attack as a way of solution. There were even talks about the possibility of using small nuclear bombs in order to eliminate the North's powerful underground conventional arms.⁴ The DPRK responded by threatening that any sanctions, whether authorized by the UN Security Council or imposed by the US with its allies, would be tantamount to an act of war against the DPRK. As with the possible US attack, Pyongyang declared that it would not hesitate to inflict "strong and merciless retaliatory measures."⁵ A new nuclear crisis again emerged between the US and North Korea. The danger was that with each resorting to escalating tactics, momentum was gaining that could have taken the situation out of the control of all the major players, leading to an eventual military conflict or even a full-scale war.

Both the US and DPRK were also calling for a solution through peaceful negotiation. But positions of the two sides were so far apart that it was not even possible to define a working mode of negotiation. Pyongyang emphasized that since its nuclear program was entirely a response to hostile US policy, the issue could be solved only through bilateral negotiations between the two countries. North Korea thus refused to participate in any multilateral discussion on the nuclear issue. On the other hand, the US argued that since North Korea posed a threat of nuclear proliferation to the international community, and Northeast Asia in particular, the issue could only be solved through the UN Security Council or

3 See "Chronology of US-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy", Arms Control Today, June 2003

4 Doug Struck, "US Focuses On N. Korea's Hidden arms: Nuclear 'Bunker-Busters' Could Damage Deterrence, Some Say," Washington Post Foreign Service, June 23, 2003

5 North Korea Threatens 'Merciless' Retaliation Against Sanctions, Agence France-Presse, Seoul, July 1, 2003

other multilateral bodies. The Bush administration was adamantly against any bilateral contacts with Pyongyang.

Against this backdrop, China came to play a significant role in arresting the tension, and bridging the gap between the two sides in terms of finding a solution acceptable to both. Thanks to its unswerving and tactful effort, China succeeded in providing a multilateral setting in which the US and DPRK were able to have direct contact and negotiation without appearing to have changed their respective positions. Beijing first of all persuaded both Washington and Pyongyang to agree to trilateral talks (plus Beijing) to be held in Beijing in April 2003. In August 2003, the trilateral talks were soon expanded to Six-Party Talks including three other major players in the region: South Korea, Japan and Russia. So far the Six-Party Talks have conducted 6 rounds of negotiations in the past 5 years. The talks proved to be an extremely complex exercise, coming close to collapse on several occasions. Particularly when the DPRK conducted an underground nuclear test on October 3, 2006, indicating that North Korea had become a de-facto nuclear weapon state despite all of its assurances to be committed to denuclearization, many believed that the Six-Party Talks would soon break down. But thanks to the patience, determination and political wisdom of the parties concerned, this multilateral negotiation body in North East Asia has proven itself to have great vitality, surviving all the setbacks and reversals and finally achieving important breakthroughs towards the goal of denuclearization on the peninsula.

The first significant breakthrough came in the form of a joint statement, reached during the

4th round of talks on September 19, 2005, which stipulated six-point principles to guide future negotiations. These principles were:

1. Reaffirmation of the goal of the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner. To that end, the DPRK committed to abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and returning, at an early date, to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to IAEA safeguards. The United States affirmed that it has no nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula and has no intention to attack or invade the DPRK with nuclear or conventional weapons. The DPRK also insisted that it has the right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy, meaning light-water reactors. The other parties expressed their respect and agreed to discuss, at an appropriate time, the subject of the provision of light water reactor to the DPRK.
2. Abiding by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and recognized norms of international relations.
3. Promotion of economic cooperation in the fields of energy, trade and investment, bilaterally and/or multilaterally. The other five parties stated their willingness to provide energy assistance to the DPRK.
4. Commitment to joint efforts for lasting peace and stability in Northeast Asia. The directly related parties will negotiate a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula in an appropriate separate forum.
5. Taking coordinated steps to implement the afore-mentioned consensus in a phased manner in line with the principle of "commitment for commitment, action for action".
6. Commitment to future talks.⁶

All these points are without doubt the essential principles to ensure the progress of the talks. However, subsequent developments mentioned above left implementation efforts stranded again. It was not until February 13, 2007, when the Six-Party Talks concluded their fifth round with an agreed "action plan" of initial steps to implement the September 19, 2005 joint statement on North Korea's denuclearization that the regional multilateral negotiation regained the necessary momentum for continuing progress.

According to the action plan, North Korea was to halt the operation of its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon during a 60-day initial phase in return for an initial shipment of 50,000 tons of heavy-fuel oil. The action plan established for the first time five working groups to "discuss and formulate specific plans" regarding: economic and energy cooperation; denuclearization; implementation of a "Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism"; North Korean relations with the United States; and, North Korean relations with Japan. The statement also envisaged the second phase of the denuclearization process, that is, following the shutdown of North Korea's nuclear facilities at Yongbyon, Pyongyang would provide a complete declaration of all of its nuclear programs and disable all of its existing nuclear facilities in return for an additional 950,000 tons of heavy-fuel oil or its equivalent. The United States, in addition, was committed to provide energy aid to North Korea, to begin

the process of removing Pyongyang from its list of state sponsors of terrorism and to stop the application of the Trading with the Enemy Act toward North Korea.⁷

The action plan of February 13, 2007 was further substantiated by another joint statement on October 3 the same year. The statement specifically set a deadline of December 31, 2007 for North Korea to provide a "complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear programs-including clarification regarding the uranium issue", and the disablement of its Yongbyon nuclear facilities. Pyongyang was also committed to disable all other nuclear facilities and not to transfer nuclear material or technology abroad - the first time this commitment had been made. In return, North Korea would receive the remaining 900,000 tons of heavy-fuel oil or its equivalent pledged in the February 13 agreement. The United States reaffirmed its commitments to begin removing North Korea from its list of state sponsors of terrorism and "advance the process of terminating the application of the Trading with the Enemy Act" toward North Korea "in parallel with" North Korea's denuclearization actions.⁸

The above quoted three legally binding documents constituted in principle a solid political basis for the eventual solution of the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula. But there were still a number of both political and technical obstacles in the specific implementation of the

6 See joint statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks, Beijing, September 19, 2005. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/53490.html>.

7 See initial Actions to Implement Six-Party Joint Statement, February 13, 2007. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2007/february/80508.html>

8 Joint Statement of the Second Session of the 6th round of the Six-Party Talks, Beijing, October 3, 2007. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/pars/ps/2007/oct/93217.html>.

obligations of each side. Disagreement soon surfaced, for example, over the declaration between the US and North Korea. The two countries disputed mainly on three issues: 1) the amount of the plutonium North Korea has produced: US officials said they believed DPRK had produced about 50kg of plutonium, or enough for about eight nuclear bombs. North Korea insisted it only had about 30 kg; 2) the uranium enrichment program: Washington suspected North Korea of having a secret program to enrich uranium for weapons while Pyongyang consistently denied it, and: 3) Nuclear proliferation: the US accused North Korea of proliferating nuclear technology and material to the likes of Syria, and again, North Korea rejected the accusation. It soon became apparent that the rift between the US and DPRK on these issues had made it impossible for Pyongyang to offer the declaration on time as requested. Pyongyang was also unable to disable its Yongbyon facilities in accordance with the timeframe of the deadline because of technical issues over the cooling of the fuel rods. On the other hand, North Korea complained about the delay of the delivery of heavy-fuel oil to North Korea by other parties, which Pyongyang warned may slow down its disablement process.

Despite all these setbacks, the atmosphere of the forum was much improved, allowing better understanding and greater tolerance of differences among those involved. Unlike previous occasions, individual parties were not eager to lay blame at the door of others. Rather, they intensified efforts in consultation to seek a solution based on mutual compromise. Particularly, direct consultations and meetings between representatives of the two principle agents - the

US and DPRK - played a critical role in eventually reaching this compromise. According to press reports, during March and April, 2008, chief representatives from the US and the DPRK were engaged in a flurry of diplomatic interactions, including meetings in Geneva and Singapore to discuss ways to make progress on North Korea's declaration, including the consideration of a compromise approach to the declaration format. The two envoys reportedly reached an agreement on the North Korean nuclear declaration which would entail North Korea's accounting for its plutonium-based nuclear weapons program and an acknowledgement of US allegations regarding its proliferation and uranium enrichment activities. These past activities would be taken up at an unspecified future time, thus ironing out the major disagreement and paving the way for progress towards denuclearization. On June 26, 2008, North Korea submitted its long-awaited nuclear declaration to China, host of the six party talks. The next day, Pyongyang demolished the cooling tower at the Yongbyon nuclear reactor. The United States accordingly announced on June 26 that it may remove North Korea from its list of state sponsors of terrorism within 45 days if the country meets all its obligations under the Six-Party Talks. This meant Washington would lift its economic sanctions against Pyongyang that had been in force since 1950.

The impressive progress in the Six-Party Talks had not been easily made. This was first of all due to the concerted efforts of all the six nations. But credit should also be particularly given to the United States and DPRK for their contribution to the eventual breakthroughs in the Six-Party Talks. The international community was almost entirely in agreement that the nuclear

crisis had been in essence the extension of a long-term confrontation. The solution of this issue could only be possible if these two countries were able to loosen the rigidity of their respective positions, and demonstrate adequate political will to negotiate in a spirit of mutual respect and mutual benefit, equality, mutual accommodation and compromise. Fortunately, during the course of the negotiation, it is clear that rationality, pragmatism and flexibility gradually gained the upper hand in both governments.

In fact, it was the Bush administration in its second term that made dramatic changes in its policy towards Pyongyang and started the ball moving. From labeling North Korea as part of the "Axis of Evil", drafting a preemptive strategy and refusing to have any direct contacts with Pyongyang, the Bush administration shifted to accepting bilateral negotiation, agreeing to a solution based on mutual compromise, and offering rewards including normalization of relations with North Korea and providing security assurance and economic assistance to Pyongyang if and when denuclearization materialized. On the part of North Korea, it seemed always ready to respond positively to any signs of relaxation in the US policy. Despite the fact that the DPRK would often resort to a strategy of brinkmanship when it felt threatened in security terms, it is quite clear that, the strategy of North Korea was to defend by launching offensives, as recent developments have demonstrated. What Pyongyang had really wanted was a deal with Washington. To put it another way, North Korea seemed willing to abandon its nuclear capabilities provided its security concerns were met. Under the circumstances, it has almost become Pyongyang's pattern of practice that whenever the Six-Party Talks met with

seemingly insurmountable difficulties, it would threaten to take drastic measures to respond to whatever provocations it thought came from the US side, but would also send signals to show it is willing, sometimes even urging, to hold bilateral talks with the US to seek a way out. The results of these consultations or agreements would then invariably become the major catalyst to boost progress in the full sessions of the Six-Party Talks. Indeed, the quiet bilateral diplomacy between the US and DPRK has already become a most important component of the whole multilateral effort.

But despite all the progress, obstacles still exist. The latter part of 2008 saw further peripatations in the path towards complete denuclearization. On the part of the US, it is still not clear if the conciliatory stance of the Bush administration towards North Korea was an indication of strategic US shift, from calls for regime change to accepting the legitimacy of North Korea as an equal partner for security cooperation, or, if all these changes have been merely based on short term expediency. Some believed that the Bush administration was in desperate need of a solution with North Korea to stabilize the situation in Northeast Asia because it has been bogged down in Iraq and having to deal with more dangerous situation in the Middle East. Others argued that George W. Bush needed a solution to the nuclear issue in North Korea as a legacy for his successor. Thus, they believe that for all the US interest in the desired deal with Pyongyang, hostility towards North Korea in Washington has not changed and would not change as their bottom line.

This belief has been further reinforced by the fact that in Washington there has never been consen-

sus with regard to North Korea policy. Although many the staunchest neo-conservatives in the Bush administration are no longer in power, there is still a powerful force of conservative hardliners in the country, who simply loathe DPRK and will accept no solution except for the collapse of the current regime. Indeed, a view has already been made public that the nuclear crisis in 2003 had been deliberately "cooked" by hardliners in the Bush administration to crush Pyongyang.⁹ Then, amidst mounting tension on the peninsula, these factions in the administration lobbied hard for a preemptive strike on the nuclear facilities in North Korea in the hope of realizing regime change. Against this backdrop, one could easily observe in the Six-Party-Talks in the past five years that at each critical juncture of reaching a breakthrough in the negotiations, some new problem would invariably crop up from the US side to crush any deals being contemplated. For example, on the eve of the agreement of the September 19 joint statement in the fourth round of the Talks in 2005, the US Department of the Treasury suddenly identified a Macau bank, Banco Delta Asia, as a "primary money laundering concern" under Section 311 of the USA Patriot Act, thereby freezing about \$25 million in North Korean funds. The punitive measure angered Pyongyang so much that it immediately destroyed much of the basic trust accumulated between the two states, putting the Six-Party Talks at deadlock again for more than a year, and leading to a nuclear test by the DPRK a year later.

Thanks to the concerted rescue efforts by the international community, and particularly to the efforts by both the Bush administration and Pyongyang, a solution to the financial issue was reached based on mutual compromise from both countries. The Six-Party Talks showed signs of being reinvigorated, and were just about to reach another important joint statement to specify concrete measures for the implementation of the September 19 agreement, when Israel suddenly launched an air-strike, destroying a Syrian facility of undetermined purpose on February 13, 2007. According to the press reports, the Israeli action was based on US and Israeli close intelligences exchanges, which were said to have shown that Syria had been building a nuclear facility with North Korean assistance. In the United States, the Bush administration, apparently under internal pressure, then strongly demanded the addition of Pyongyang's past proliferation records to the agenda in the Six-Party Talks. However, this addition served only to unnecessarily complicate the denuclearization process and Pyongyang understandably rejected it.

This was followed by another unexpected skirmish between the US and the DPRK, which would transpire to have a very negative impact on the process of denuclearization. On August 12, 2008, White House spokesman Tony Fratto announced that the US was not removing the DPRK from the terror list for now as there was the need for a strong "verification regime" of its nuclear

9 See, for example, P Parameswaran "Intel Spin by US Hardliners Sparked N. Korean Crisis: Book", news report, Agence-France-Presse, Washington, August 4, 2008. The report said that a new book written by a former CNN journalist Mike Chinoy would be released soon, which revealed an inside story that hardliners in US President George W. Bush's administration had spun intelligence and triggered a nuclear crisis with the DPRK.

programs.¹⁰ Pyongyang responded by resorting to its familiar tactics of brinkmanship, announcing it had stopped disabling its nuclear reactor and threatening to restore the plutonium-producing facility.¹¹ Although Washington finally agreed to remove the DPRK from the US list of terror sponsors, opening the way for the DPRK to move forward, it seemed too late to secure North Korea's cooperation to close a deal with the Bush administration in its last months. After a hiatus of five months of stalling, a meeting of heads of member delegations of the Six-Party Talks was held in Beijing on December 8-11, 2008. Intensive negotiations in the subsequent four days failed to reach agreement on the major theme of the verification on the DPRK's nuclear past activities, owing to the firm rejection by Pyongyang of verification proposals offered by the other nations in the talks. According to US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, 80 percent of the verification protocol has actually been agreed upon. "What the North wouldn't do is go the last 20 percent, which is to clarify some of the elements of scientific procedures that might be used to sample the soil."¹² And even for the controversial part of the protocol,, it should not be too difficult for the DPRK to agree upon as it conforms to international standards of verification, which Pyongyang had actually agreed to accept before. So, what happened in the meeting was that "the North Koreans did not want to put into writing what they have said in words."

Obviously, the DPRK's intransigency is not so much a reflection of its unwillingness to make a deal with the US on the nuclear issue as its shrewd calculation of the disadvantage of making such a deal with the Bush administration, by then a lame duck. They rather seemed to adopt a policy of waiting until the Obama administration entered office. But the open question is will President Obama continue to demonstrate as much enthusiasm as his predecessor in the last days of his tenure? The good news is that, from all the signs, Obama may by and large go back to the old line of Clinton's time, attaching importance to clinching a deal through direct contact with the DPRK. To that end, Obama has already said that he would be pleased to meet with Kim Jong-il in person. But on the other hand, Obama will find that North Korea is far from a top priority on his agenda when he goes into the White House. There are many more pressing issues waiting for him to fix, which would consume most of his time and energy. How much will be left for him to focus on the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula? The risk is thus if he prefers to let the issue be shelved for some time, Pyongyang may perceive this as a negative sign.

However, we cannot know precisely to what extent the above mentioned uncertainties may have impact on the minds of the leadership of North Korea. Past experience shows that Pyongyang would not give up its nuclear capabilities unless it succeeded in achieving two major objectives:

10 "US Says Not to Remove DPRK from Terror List for Now", News report, Xinhua News Agency, Beijing, August 13, 2008. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-08/13/content_9241904.html.

11 Jae-soon Chang, "N. Korea Says It Halts Nuclear Reactor Disabling", Associated Press, Seoul, August 26, 2008.

12 "Rice Defends 6-Way Talks as Only Way to Denuclearization N. Korea", Korea Times, December 22, 2008.

normalizing relations with the US and getting economic assistance from the international community. If Pyongyang were to believe that it would not be able to get that deal on its own terms, the idea of protecting security through arms build-up, including nuclear capability build-up, would surely arise once again. It is in this sense that one may well argue that in the process of denuclearization, the ball has always been at the court of the US and its allies.

The Six Party Talks could also be further negatively affected by other factors. Japan's attitude, for example, of linking the progress of denuclearization with the abduction issue is fully understandable but may not lead to a satisfactory result if unduly stressed in the wrong setting or at the wrong time. On another front, the new harsh policy of President Lee Myung-bak in South Korea has soured North-South relations, casting a new shadow over the prospects of the denuclearization process.

Consolidating the basics for a peace mechanism on the Korean Peninsula - another building block for a sustained and effective security architecture in Northeast Asia

Assuming the nuclear crisis in The DPRK achieves further breakthroughs towards an eventual solution through the concerted efforts by all members in the Six-Party Talks, it would then be high time to proceed with exploratory measures for the creation of a peace mechanism on the Korean Peninsula, another essential building block

for a sustained and effective security architecture in Northeast Asia. As a matter of fact, one of the working groups set up within the framework of the Six-Party Talks is precisely mandated with such a task, reflecting a common vision among the major players in the region that a peace mechanism on the peninsula would not only be beneficial in embedding the solution of the nuclear issue in a more institutionalized framework, but would also be essential in removing the last relics of the Cold War and opening up the way for multilateral cooperation in the region.

Solution of the issue essentially is a question of codifying a process of relaxation of tension, political reconciliation and eventual peaceful unification of the two Koreas. For, without the emergence and consolidation of this basic condition, building a peace mechanism is like building castles in the air. But that is precisely where the greatest challenge lies. The two Koreas were locked in such a rigid confrontation in the wake of the Korean War (1950-53) that there was not even the slightest possibility of building a direct dialogue in the first two decades of the Cold War. As one account puts it, "(n)either recognized the legitimacy of the other, and dialogue did not advance beyond mutual recriminations over North Korean provocations. Reflecting acute zero-sum attitudes toward cooperation, both governments considered unification only within the context of the overthrow of one system by the other (sônggong t'ongil)."¹³

Occasional initial contacts in the form of unification dialogues did take place, however, par-

13 Victor D. Cha, "Korean Unification: the Zero-Sum Past and the Precarious Future"

ticularly when the broad situation in Northeast Asia saw dramatic changes and the two Koreas attempted to adapt to new developments in the global geo-political landscape, although each generally continued with zero-sum mentalities. When Nixon visited China, resulting in an astonishingly speedy thaw of the Sino-US relations in early 1972, for example, the shock wave also extended to the Korean Peninsula. Against this backdrop emerged the first attempts at dialogue by the two sides, which first focused on the humanitarian issue of the reunification of separated families, handled by North and South Korean Red Cross officials. But together with it was also secret high-level official contact. These visits soon resulted in the announcement of the North-South Communiqué on July 4, 1972. The document highlighted especially the agreement of the two sides on the principles of future unification, which included among other things: 1) independent efforts of the two Koreas, and without interference from external powers; 2) the use of peaceful means, not the use of force; and 3) the fostering of a "grand national unity." The communiqué provided for the establishment of the North-South Coordinating Committee (NSCC) which was to serve as the primary governmental channel for direct dialogue on unification issues. Finally, to further increase transparency and avert miscalculation, the two governments established a direct telephone "hotline."

These were the first serious efforts by both of the two Koreas to seek the relaxation of the tension in the Peninsula, and explore the peaceful unification in non-zero-sum terms. But neither domestic nor international conditions at the time were conducive to such an objective. All the measures agreed on for the implementation were

soon aborted and contacts terminated. The mid-1980s saw another wave of attempts of dialogue and contacts between the two sides, which included the resumption previously suspended Red Cross talks, the reconnection of telephone hotlines, convening of a parliamentary conference, and, in a most emotional fashion, the fielding of united national sports teams for various major sports events. But again, all the exchanges ended without essential change in the confrontational nature of their bilateral relationship. When the Rangoon bombing against the South Korean cabinet took place in October 1983, all the pledges of good will from both sides were ripped up and tension remounted across the 38th Parallel.

The third and most encouraging period of inter-Korean contact occurred from 1988-1992. It was the time when the Soviet Union was disintegrating, the global bipolar structure collapsed and the Cold War ended. The dramatic change of the security landscape in the world in general and in Northeast Asia in particular impacted greatly on the threat perception and security strategy of both Koreas. Seeking greater independence in better protecting security interests, on July 7, 1988, the then ROK President Roh Tae-woo issued a "special statement for national dignity, unification and prosperity", formally initiating his famous "Northern Policy", which stressed that the South no longer took the North as an enemy, but the partner for the future unification. Relations between the two sides warmed up again with increasing interactions in many fields. Highlighting this growth in inter-Korean contacts were the three exchange of visits between ROK Premier Kang Young-hoon and his counterpart of North Korea in September-December 1990, which resulted in the signing

of two accords: the Basic Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-aggression, and Exchanges and Cooperation, (December 13), and the Joint Declaration on Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula (December 31).

These two documents represented a major step forward towards the political reconciliation of the two sides, and indeed offered a practical blueprint for an eventual unification. Compared to the 1972 Communiqué, the two documents were more significant because: 1) they were more like an international treaty, thus endowed with greater binding authority; 2) The documents were more explicit in upholding basic principles of mutual contacts, including acknowledging the legitimacy of each system, thereby ending decades of mutual non-recognition; 3) The documents also substantiated greatly the content of national unity, making the efforts to that end more operational; 4) The documents laid out an institutional "roadmap" for unification, including creating a liaison office at Panmunjom, and joint committees for security affairs and cooperative exchanges, proposing specific confidence-building measures in the military field; 5) The documents also showed for the first time that North Korea agreed to discuss nuclear matters with the South, and accepted the obligation of the complete denuclearization of the Peninsula. In short, the 1991 accords represented a more sophisticated understanding of the unification process.

These improvements in contacts between the two sides were derailed when the conservative President Kim Young-sam came to power in the South in 1992, and immediately reversed the rapprochement policy with the DPRK. In the

meantime, Pyongyang was also soon bogged down in the nuclear crisis with the United States. But the two documents still established themselves a place in the process of political reconciliation, providing an inerasable legal framework for dealing with issues of peace and unification on the Peninsula. In the spirit of the documents, the two Koreas joined the United Nations respectively at the same time in September 1991 as two separate sovereign states.

When Kim Dae-jung became the new ROK president in 1998, the bilateral relationship between the North and South took another new turn. In a reversal of the policy of Kim Young-sam, Kim Dae-jung argued that unification was only a long-term objective, and that the immediate pressing task for the South Korean government was not to seek unification, but rather to ensure peace on the Peninsula and peaceful coexistence with the North. He vowed to work together with Pyongyang to develop a more propitious environment on the Peninsula, conducive to the development of a North-South community. His policy was thus labeled the "Sunshine Policy". Unlike Kim Yung-sam's confrontational policy, Seoul initiated a series of policies in favor of improving the relations with the North such as providing large scale economic assistance to the DPRK, undertaking the construction of light water reactors, bringing about the reunion of separated families, and so on. In addition to his enthusiasm for engaging with the North over a solution of the nuclear crisis, one of the strongest areas of Kim Dae-jung's policy was that he stressed the separation of politics and economic interaction. In his view, the more tension and suspicion underpinned bilateral relations, the more need arose to break the political impasse

by enlarging economic and trade interactions so as to create greater common interest and mutual trust. He thus encouraged South Korean businesses to increase investment and carry out various forms of economic exchange and cooperation even if the two sides still had serious disagreements in the fields of politics and security. The Sunshine Policy led to the substantial improvement of bilateral cooperation between the DPRK and ROK, culminating in a summit meeting in Pyongyang on March 9, 2000. As is mentioned above, the event was unprecedented in its significance as it marked the first meeting between the leaders of the two countries since the Korean Peninsula was divided after World War Two, 55 years previously. It also played an important role in helping Kim Dae-jung achieve the Nobel Peace Prize later that year.

President Roh Moo-hyun, Kim Dae-jung's successor in February 2003, was even more ambitious in pursuing the Sunshine Policy. He came to power against a backdrop of his country experiencing increasingly strong economic development after overcoming the Asian financial crisis, and domestic determination to build South Korea into a more powerful and prosperous country within Northeast Asia. To that end, he keenly felt that the realization of reconciliation with the North and sustained peace and stability on the Peninsula would be a precondition. It was also at the time when Pyongyang intensified its confrontation with the United States on the nuclear issue. Faced with the nuclear issue as his immediate and most daunting challenge, President Roh expressed his firm opposition to the possession of nuclear weapons by the DPRK while stressing the issue must be resolved peacefully.

He rejected any arguments for military actions or sanctions, while expressing his willingness to continue close cooperation with the South's allies, US and Japan. Roh also maintained close consultation and cooperation with China and Russia in the hope of urging Pyongyang to join the multilateral negotiation process of the Six-Party Talks. Roh even suggested that if the nuclear issue came to a satisfactory solution, he would endeavor to work together with the North to end the decades-long confrontation, and build a cooperative North-South community on the peninsula through concluding a peace treaty with Pyongyang during his tenure of presidency. Although he failed to realize that goal, Roh nevertheless still managed to visit Pyongyang and hold another summit meeting with Kim Jong-Il in October 2007, pushing bilateral relations to a new high just four months before he stepped down. The summit meeting resulted in another joint declaration, which contained a number of specific projects that could, if implemented, build closer economic and security ties between the Koreans.

According to the declaration, the South would build a special economic zone in Haeju, a port town in southwestern North Korea, and establish a joint fishing area in nearby disputed waters in the Yellow Sea. The two sides would also worked to establish joint use of a nearby river and shipping routes in waters that had long been the focal point of North-South military clashes. The South would also rebuild a railway connecting Kaesong with Sinuiju, a North Korean town on China's border, as well as a highway between Kaesong and Pyongyang, the North's capital. In addition, the South would construct a shipbuilding complex in Nampo, a town southwest of

Pyongyang. All of these projects were in keeping with the South's long-term goal of reducing the economic gap between the Koreas, a necessary step toward reunification in Seoul's view. More immediately, though, the declaration reflected the South's strategy of trying to achieve security on the peninsula by forging economic and other ties with the North. The two sides also agreed to work toward signing a formal peace treaty for the Korean War. This point appeared to be a concession by the North as it had long maintained that South Korea would not be involved in any peace negotiation because the signers of the 1953 armistice were North Korea, China and the United Nations force led by the United States.

Thanks to the increasing interaction of the two Koreas in the first decade in the new millennium under Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moon-hyun, bilateral relations between the North and South have seen rapid improvements. Families separated by the 1950-53 Korean War have held reunions, trade has increased from \$13 million in 1990 to \$1.3 billion in 2007, some 1,000 South Korean tourists now cross the border each day for sightseeing, and by 2007 North Korean workers produced \$11 million worth of goods a month at South Korean-run factories in an industrial complex in the North.¹⁴

The process of détente, however, has also produced great misgivings from ROK's allies, and the United States in particular. Complaints were increasingly heard from Washington over the non-cooperative attitude of President Roh Moon-

hyun on the nuclear issue. Under US pressure, Roh had to rein his conciliatory policy towards the North to some extent in the latter part of his second term. After all, South Korea could not pursue its Sunshine Policy without its security alliance with the United States as the cornerstone for its defense strategy. Domestically, a lack of tangible results from the Sunshine Policy in terms of softening the tough approach of the DPRK had also intensified the rift in the public opinion regarding policy towards the North. When evidence emerged that both Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moon-hyun had sent large sums of money to "bribe" the North for the summit meetings, their reputation was rapidly sullied and the political atmosphere seemed suddenly to change in tone.

This change of political sentiments in South Korea helped the conservative Grand National Party candidate Lee Myung-bak win the presidential election in December 2007, ending the ten-year rule by the liberal-democrats represented by Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun.

A celebrated entrepreneur-turned-politician by background, Lee has been a legendary figure. As a countryside boy who could not even eat regular meals, Lee became the chairman of a prominent conglomerate¹⁵ then Mayor of Seoul, and ended up being the president of the country chiefly through self-struggle. Pragmatism is said to be the motto of his whole career, which leads many people to believe that he may also use pragmatism as his guiding principle to govern the country in the future. Like many newly

¹⁴ Choe Sang-hun, "Two Koreas Plan Summit Meeting in Pyongyang", International Herald Tribune, August 8, 2007. <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/08/08/asia/korea.php>.

elected president, Lee Myung-bak wanted to establish his administration as the start of a "new era". In fact, in his inauguration speech on February 25, 2008, he declared "the year 2008 as the starting year for the advancement of the Republic of Korea."¹⁵ Meanwhile, Lee spared no effort to stress that his policy would radically differ to that of Roh Moo-hyun, assailing the last ten "confused and faltering" years of his predecessors. The new president pledged to bring about a fundamental shift in direction of both the domestic and international policies of his predecessors.

Nowhere is this shift more noteworthy than in subsequent announcements on foreign and security policy, particularly towards the DPRK. Lee ushered in the following three important changes that departed conspicuously from the Sunshine Policy of previous administrations.

Firstly, unlike Roh Moo-hyun's often lukewarm attitude towards the United States and sometimes emotional confrontations against Japan, Lee made it clear that he would put strengthening relations with both countries as the cornerstone of his global diplomacy. "We will work to develop and further strengthen traditional friendly relations with the United States into a future-oriented partnership. Based on the deep mutual trust that exists between the two peoples, we will also strengthen our strategic alliance with the United States", he declared. With regard to

Japan, Lee "called for building a new era in Japan-South Korea relations". He expressed willingness to resume stalled high-level reciprocal visits, accelerate preparations for restarting free trade negotiations, and step up cooperation on the DPRK nuclear problem with Tokyo in the Six-Party Talks¹⁶. It was within this newly established context that many substantive measures which would have been highly unlikely or even unimaginable in Roh's years were reportedly under active consideration. They notably included, among other things, enhancing the combined operational capability with the United States in case of war on the Korean Peninsula, ranging from upgrading the current Combined Marine Forces Command (CMFC) to the Combined Marine Forces Component Command (CMCC); joining the US-led Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI); participating in the US missile defense system deployment in East Asia; reconsidering the timing of implementing the ROK-US agreement concerning the transfer of wartime operational control; and reviving the Trilateral US-Japan-South Korea process (TCOG) in the hope of better coordinating the strategic moves among the three allies particularly towards North Korea¹⁷.

Secondly, Lee evidently had no interest in putting inter-Korean relations as the top priority on his national agenda, claiming that progress in that respect would solely hinge on the progress of denuclearization of the DPRK. He was particu-

15 Lee Myung-bak, Inaugural Speech, February 25, 2008. http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_editorial/271850.htm.

16 Ibid.

17 See, for example, "ROK Must Be circumspect On Full-Scale Participation in PSI", Seoul Shinmun Editorial, February 29, 2008; "Korea's JCS Gives Ideas On BMD: US Weekly", Yonhap, Washington, March 17, 2008

larly unhappy about his predecessor's "unconditional appeasement policy towards the DPRK". From now on, he stressed a more pragmatic reciprocity principle in linking Pyongyang's nuclear abandonment with its opening to aid from outside. That seemed something like a return to the old policy of former President Kim Young-sam. On this basis, his Unification Minister Kim Ha-joong confirmed that the ROK would hold off on the plan of expanding a joint industrial complex in the DPRK until the standoff over the nuclear program was settled. The new president's rationale seemed to be that it was Pyongyang, not Seoul, that badly needs the other side's assistance, thus the South could afford to adopt a wait and see policy. Behind this no-hurry stance, one could easily detect his emphasis on putting "national security interests" before the inter-Korean relations. Lee had complained during the election campaign that previous administrations had been too eager to meet the demands of the North, which, in his view, virtually helped the DPRK's military operation and thus jeopardized the security of the South. He vowed to reverse the pattern by stressing that economic assistance must be based on certain reciprocal moves by Pyongyang.

Lastly, Lee emphasized the importance of human rights factor in his policy towards the DPRK. In contrast to his predecessors' often low-key stance on the issue, the new administration has stressed that the ROK will not place nuclear or geopolitical issues ahead of human rights concerns when dealing with the DPRK. "The Government of the Republic of Korea, underscoring human rights as a universal value, calls upon the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to take appropriate measures to address

the international community's concern that the human rights situation in the DPRK has not improved," he declared. The new president vowed that he would not shy away from criticizing the DPRK: "I think unconditionally avoiding criticism of North Korea would not be appropriate," he told a news conference the day after the election, "(i)f we try to point out North Korea's shortcomings, with affection, I think that would make North Korean society healthier."

Lee also offered big carrots while putting on a stern face to Pyongyang. This found expression especially in his ambitious "non-nuclear, open, and 3000" plan by which he pledged to provide investment to help North Korea achieve \$3000 per capita GDP within the future ten years if the North gave up nuclear weapons and opened its society and markets. According to the interpretation of one South Korean analyst, the 'Vision 3000' policy is also designed to prepare a foundation for a peaceful unification: "(w)hen the North and the South achieve the annual per capita income of \$3,000 and \$40,000 dollars respectively, both Koreas can minimize prospective social shocks and budget in the case of unification. Raising the North's annual per capita income up to the level of \$3,000 dollars within 10 years will make the North Korean economy ready for unification." To that end, Lee offered to meet DPRK leader Kim Jong-il if necessary to discuss the reunification of the ROK and the DPRK. But again all these incentives could materialize only if and when Pyongyang first completely denuclearizes and opens up to the outside.

Characterized by a strong conservative inclination as opposed to a more pragmatic approach,

Lee Myung-bak's policy has no doubt received warm endorsement and welcome from the United States and Japan as well as conservatives in his own country. The shift of its focus understandably reflects a sentiment of frustration and impatience among many in those three countries with regard to the lack of tangible progress in the denuclearization process on the peninsula, and concerns that the gap between South Korea on the one hand and the United States and Japan on the other was becoming increasingly wide, putting the entire alliance architecture of Northeast Asia at risk of collapse. But then there seems an obvious tension between Lee's conservative instincts and his pragmatic style of doing business. Thus, the big challenge he had to immediately face was to what extent his much-touted pragmatism would or would not be affected by his staunchly conservative nature.

For all the defects or flaws that it had demonstrated, it is fair to say that the Sunshine Policy had its merits. Indeed, it is precisely owing to the Sunshine Policy that a propitious period of relaxation of pressure on the peninsula has been in train: tension in the Korean Peninsula has dramatically reduced, economic interaction between North and South deepened, and the role of South Korea in the solution of the nuclear issue enhanced. Although claiming to adopt a different stance to previous administrations may be emotionally gratifying, it is highly unlikely the new president could continue the process of communication and interaction between the two sides only after Pyongyang plays entirely by Seoul's terms. The new president certainly has

a legitimate right to demonstrate that he is different from his predecessors, but he should guard against throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

As a matter of fact, the demand that progress can be achieved in inter-Korean relations only after the DPRK implements its obligations for denuclearization sounds quite familiar. It looks in essence just like a new version of George W. Bush's policy towards the North during his first six years in the White House. That policy failed and was eventually discarded by the Bush administration. How could one expect a different outcome now that Lee has reinstated it and is setting out his stall by it? As was almost certain to occur, President Lee Myung-bak's hard-line stance has not brought South Korea any benefits. On the contrary, it has landed him almost in a disastrous dilemma.

Lee's hard-line policy has evidently infuriated the DPRK. Pyongyang has ratcheted up its criticism against moves by the ROK to tighten its US alliance, calling the strengthened ties between Washington and Seoul "machinations to militarily suppress" the North. It has also vehemently rejected the accusation by the new administration against the North's so-called "bad human rights record" at the seventh session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, stressing that it took the accusing remarks at the UN session "as ignominious speech that forces the North and South into confrontation and completely negates the spirit of the June 15 joint declaration."¹⁸ Furthermore, the shift in policy orientation of the new ROK government seemed

18 Jung Sung-ki, "North Opens Criticism on South", Korea Times, March 9, 2008.

also to cause a temporary change in Pyongyang's policy focus. It categorically refused to have anything to do with any further dealings with Seoul, and shifted to communicating only with the United States. As a result, the bilateral cooperative relations between the two sides have been brought to an end almost overnight. All the major inter-Korean economic cooperation projects are now suspended or greatly reduced. All the contact routes built up during the past ten years have been closed.

In the meantime, although fortifying the alliance with the United States and improving ties with Japan make sense, overstating the importance of these ties in a doctrine of "alliance first" has reduced rather than enlarged the role that Seoul can play in the international arena. ROK's national interests cannot always overlap with those of its allies. When specific disputes concerning the national interests of each country arise, relations with these allies continue to sour regardless of Lee's good intentions. When Lee Myung-bak rashly lifted the embargo on imported beef from the US in June 2008, public opinion became incensed by the government's actions. Thousands upon thousands of people took to the streets to stage anti-America and anti-Lee Myung-bak demonstrations. Many major cities, including Seoul, were virtually paralyzed for several days. The incident has made the already damaged US-ROK bilateral relations even more strained. In a similar manner, faced with provocative Japanese actions over territorial dispute, ROK-Japan relations suffered a downturn in 2008. On the nuclear issue, Seoul had previously had more common language with China,

and worked with Beijing as honest mediators in eventually persuading Washington and Tokyo to reach agreement in the Six-Party Talks. The change in its position has virtually marginalized the role of South Korea in the multilateral forum.

This diplomatic mess has exacerbated the polarization of domestic opinion regarding ROK's North policy. Under heavy pressure for the re-adjustment of his policy, the President did make great efforts to mend the fence. Several of his aides have been replaced with people with more practical expertise of security and foreign affairs. He himself seemed also now to deliberately softened his tone towards the North, emphasizing the cooperative nature of his policy. But on the whole, it appears that he still needs more time to change the substance of his tough position over the North. Seoul seems to be hoping that Pyongyang may change first in its hostile stance towards the South. As one senior government official noted in a news report, the DPRK "doesn't always maintain a hard-line stance against South Korea. We've been told through various channels that the position has become more flexible." The official added, "President Lee doesn't regard the inter-Korean relations as stalemated or inter-Korean tension as fixed. He believes that inter-Korean relations have been deadlocked before, and this can change according to circumstances."¹⁹

Not all agree with his "wait and see" attitude. As one critic writes:

"Lee Myung-bak's policy toward DPRK - to wait - on the one hand means he won't do any-

19 "Inter-Korean Channels "not Completely Blocked", Chosun Ilbo News report, Seoul, December 22, 2008

thing before DPRK changes, but on the other, it also implies Lee's helplessness and sense of shame that there is actually nothing to do. The reason Lee administration is sticking to such a hard line despite its failure is because Lee is surrounded with an unrealistic, limited belief that such waiting will eventually bring change to the DPRK. It is time that Lee creeps out of his little cave and looks around at the outside world."²⁰

So, unfortunately, this is the present state of North-South relations, which offers little hope for the quick resumption of contact and dialogue between the two sides in the near future. But one needs not to be too pessimistic. The interaction of the two sides has seen many ups and downs in history. This setback may also be a small episode in the long process of détente, reconciliation and eventual peaceful unification as a general historical trend. For one thing, President Lee Myung-bak may be right when he predicted that the North cannot always maintain a non-contact hard-line policy towards the South because the rigid stalemate between the two sides hurts both. But can the South afford to maintain a non-contact policy for long? Under the circumstances, it is hoped that although national unification may be a long-term objective, hardly achievable in the foreseeable future despite continuing heated debate on the issue, it is still possible and feasible for the two Koreas to eventually come together to resume the efforts for political reconciliation and economic cooperation, particularly with the continu-

ing progress of the peaceful resolution of the nuclear crisis in the DPRK, thereby consolidating the primary basis for all peace mechanisms on the Korean Peninsula: the rapprochement and reconciliation of the two Koreas.

Building a more propitious regional framework for a sustained and effective security architecture in Northeast Asia

But assuming the two above mentioned objectives are achieved much needs still to be done for the creation of a sustainable peace mechanism on the Korean Peninsula. In this respect, suggestions by James Goodby and Markku Heiskanen, two eminent US security analysts, are quite to the point. In their view:

"There are essentially three inter-related elements that bear on bringing peace to divided Korea: an agreement to end the armistice agreement, a larger cluster of agreements that create conditions for peace in Korea, and, finally a regional framework that provides a mechanism for resolving conflicts and promoting peace in a region where divided Korea is not the only bitter residue of the past."²¹

The three tasks, insightfully envisaged, point to one thing, that is, all related security arrangements in Northeast Asia, and on the Korean Peninsula in particular, should be synchronized.

With regard to the first task of concluding the

20 Kim Kernshik, "MB's Limited scope in DPRK issue", Pressian, Seoul, December 19, 2008.

21 James Goodby and Markku Heiskanen, "Emerging Regional Security Architecture in Northeast Asia", Policy Forum Online 08-001 A, Nautilus, January 3, 2008. <http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/08001GoodbyHeiskanen.html>.

armistice agreement, it should not be a major sticking point so long as progress is made on the other two essential elements stated above. However, there is the problem of who would be the right participants in any talks. Since the armistice was signed by three parties, the DPRK, China and the US, it should be the responsibility of these three state-parties, technically, to sign the peace treaty, so as to bring an end to the state of war and realize permanent peace on the Peninsula. The ROK did not sign the truce agreement owing to its objection to the arrangement at the time. So, any change of the status of the armistice should theoretically be none of Seoul's business. But common sense also suggests that it would be meaningless to have a working peace mechanism which excluded South Korea - a party directly involved in the Korean War - from the efforts. On the other hand, there were also hints from some Western and South Korean quarters that since the current directly involved parties for the peace on the Peninsula are the two Koreas plus the US, it would be appropriate for these three sides to sign the peace treaty to replace the armistice while China could act as an external "guaranteeing power". But it is equally ridiculous to bar China from joining the exercise of peacemaking on the Peninsula as a directly involved party in the Korean War. Leaving the legal aspect aside, it would be practically inconceivable to transform the armistice into a peace treaty by excluding China, a country that made the decisive contribution to thwarting the American advance on the Peninsula during the Korean War with great national sacrifice. After intense consultation among these related states, consensus seems to have finally emerged, that it should be first of all the four states - China, the US and the two Koreas - that are responsi-

ble for meeting and discussing the issue of the peace treaty. The first such attempts were made by convening the four-party meetings from December 1997 until August 1999. Six rounds of meetings were held during the period, focusing on the possibility of creating a peace mechanism and solving issues in relation with ameliorating tension in the Korean Peninsula. Although nothing substantial came out of the efforts of the four-party meetings, it nevertheless proved a useful forum tackling the subject of the creation of a peace mechanism.

With regard to the necessary security arrangements to provide favorable conditions for the peace on the Peninsula, they chiefly involve the future policy orientation of the two Koreas, and their relations with the major powers in the region. This issue would be more difficult to solve as the security arrangements required involve reshaping virtually the entire security landscape of the peninsula. At heart of the major concerns are the nature and mission of the US-ROK military and security alliance in the future. People will ask, if peace is realized on the Peninsula, and the DPRK enjoys normalized relations with both the US and the ROK, is it still necessary to maintain such an alliance, which is justified solely as a defense against a possible attack from the North? If the answer is yes, the question then is for what purpose, and whom to target? Furthermore, Washington has also stressed that its security alliances in Northeast Asia would not only be essential to ensure peace and security on the Korean Peninsula, but also instrumental in supporting US military actions in other contingencies in the region and even beyond. This would be bound to raise questions to many other countries. To China, for example, if the US-ROK

security alliance were to be evoked in any military conflict across the Taiwan Strait, Beijing would surely consider it a gross interference in its internal affairs. Related to this issue are also the future attitude of the DPRK towards the US-ROK security alliance and the deployment of the US military forces on the Peninsula. In fact, Pyongyang has blocked any progress in the afore-mentioned four-party meetings because it had firmly demanded the withdrawal of the US military presence from the Peninsula as the prerequisite for establishing a peace mechanism in the Peninsula. The subsequent years seemed to witness some subtle changes of the position of the DPRK, which seemed sometimes fussy on the issue, and occasionally has even gone so far as saying it could accept US deployment on its own soil. In short, all these would be tough issues to be further addressed.

A more fundamental challenge, though, may lie in the implementation of the third task suggested by Goodby and Heiskanen. For a peace mechanism on the Korean Peninsula would not equate to a complete and robust security architecture in Northeast Asia as a whole. Thus, building on the creation of a peace mechanism on the Korean Peninsula, there would still be a need to create a region-wide framework that would not only sustain peace and security on the Peninsula, but more importantly, provide a mechanism to enhance regional cooperation, conflict resolution, and confidence and trust building among all the nations involved. First and foremost, this task involves the basic strategic approaches of the major powers, namely, the US, Japan, China and Russia and the resultant bilateral relations among them.

As indicated before, what adds to the difficulty of relations between these major players is a growing amount of complexity and unpredictability for which the Cold War experience sets no precedent. In an increasingly interconnected environment, the major powers are becoming interdependent but also mutually constrained. The situation requires significant readjustment of threat perception and pinpointing from where a threat comes. What is more, no longer is the line so clear-cut between an ally or a friend on one side, and an adversary or even an enemy on the other, as was the case during the Cold War. The picture is no longer black and white. In many cases, these major powers find that they could be friends and adversaries at the same time. In other cases, they could be friends and partners in some fields but adversaries in the others. Or, they could be friends and partners at the present time but become adversaries in the future. It is in this context that, although every nation wishes to have a new security architecture in Northeast Asia capable of ensuring their security interests, their perceived interests are not always overlapping, and the means to that end could be through conflict. This gap in terms of approach has the potential to give rise to what are called "structural problems", and which constitute one of the major hurdles to the creation of a security structure in the region acceptable to these countries.

Among these major powers, for better or worse, the United States is obviously the main driver of the security architecture in Northeast Asia. To be sure, the US is not a Northeast East Asian nation geographically, but, in terms of strategic interests, they have a lot at stake in terms of maintaining a presence and participating in the region. To ensure the protection of its core interests and main-

tain its dominance in Northeast Asia, since the onset of the Cold War US foreign policy has consistently been based on a 'hub-and-spokes' model. This conceptualizes the United States as the hub, that is, positioned to wield its power through its bilateral relationships with the spokes, Asian countries. To this end, it has developed a network of bilateral alliances and agreements with countries such as Japan, Korea, Australia, the Philippines and others. The US bilateral alliance relationships have always been critically important as the bedrock for whatever security architecture is to emerge in the region.

According to Gerald Curtis, one of the most prestigious US specialists on Northeast Asia, "the hub and spokes strategy rested on two key assumptions. The first was that the US needed alliances in East Asia in order to contain the Soviet Union and communist China. The second was that a multilateral approach would not work in East Asia since the countries there, unlike the situation in Western Europe, had little in common to tie them together". Thus, "the only realistic security architecture for the region would have to involve extending "spokes" country by country." But the author also argues that these two assumptions have become increasingly obsolete for two fundamental reasons. "The first is that East Asian regionalism, like Western European regionalism, is not necessarily inimical to US national interests...The second is that...the hub and spokes approach is no longer adequate to secure US interests in the East Asian region." So, his conclu-

sion is that "(t)he US should actively support new multilateral approaches to developing security discussions with East Asian countries."²²

Curtis' point reflects a view of many realistic and sober-minded people in the United States who call for the political discourse in Washington to discuss the need for the US to modify and readjust its East Asian policy to adapt to the rapid development of multi-polarity and other new trends in East Asian regionalism. In fact, that seems to have begun to happen even in the latter part of George W. Bush's second term in office. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, for example, reportedly stressed the value of Six-Party talks as the only way to bring about DPRK denuclearization.

"I think more will be achieved, but it's really only going to be achieved in the context of the six parties, because if you don't have China and South Korea and Russia and Japan at the table, too, then the North can play the game that they used to play of getting benefits from other parts of the international community and refusing to carry forward on its obligations" she said.²³

More and more people have come to believe that, in current circumstances, "this framework has high potential for evolving into a multilateral security cooperation system that would continue promoting peace and stability in Northeast Asia even after the talks achieve a nuclear-free Korean peninsula."²⁴

22 Gerald Curtis, "Rethinking US East Asia Policy", Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Technology, January 11, 2004. <http://www.rieti.go.jp/en/papers/contribution/curtis/03.html>.

23 "Rice Defends 6-Way Talks as Only Way to Denuclearize N. Korea", Korea Times, December 22.

24 Lee Jae Young, "US strategy for Peace in Northeast Asia", Seoul Insights, January 28, 2008. http://www.upiasia.com/Security/2008/01/28/us_strategy_for-peace_in_northeast-asia/1560/.

But would that indicate that the US will adopt an entirely different approach to the creation of the security architecture in North East Asia? This is unlikely. Continuity is, alas, more likely than change. According to Joe Nye, the new US security strategy for Asia should best rest on three pillars: "our alliances, our forward military presence and our participation in multilateral dialogue."²⁵ Evidently, the multilateral dialogue Nye referred to is but only a sort of "à la carte" multilateralism, served more to function as a supplementary "spoke" while the bilateral security alliances and the US military presence continue to be the "hub". Against the backdrop of this expected slightly modified strategy, Washington would be confronted with a number of tough issues that will have to address in the future:

The first is how to strike a balance between its security alliances and arrangements on the one hand, and the multilateral arrangements on the other. Taking the latter only as complementary measures in the design of the future architecture in the region virtually suggests that on a fundamental level the US does not propose any substantial changes to its policy. Furthermore, augmenting its bilateral security alliances could become a daunting challenge in the future. Most of these security arrangements, the US-ROK security arrangement in particular, have increasingly been demonstrating a centrifugal trend towards Washington in terms of desire for their continuation, not the least driven by the rising anti-American national sentiments in the respective allied countries. They threaten to bring about

the unraveling of the US whole security design, if not well attended to.

The second is how to strike a balance between hedging and containing China on the one hand, and seeking cooperation with this rising power on the other? The Asia-Pacific has seen the rise of various emerging powers such as China, India and Russia, whose policy orientation may be in conflict with US vital interests, and constitute the most serious threats to its dominant position in East Asia. But among all those candidates of rivalry, what the US is truly worried about is the uncertain impact of a rising China that it fears might dictate regional security in the future development of Northeast Asian regionalism. Washington has in fact made no secret of this concern, stressing explicitly that "of the major and emerging powers, China has the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States and field disruptive military technologies that could over time offset traditional US military advantages absent in US counter strategies."²⁶ To guard against this almost certain inevitability seems to become the main focus in its efforts to build the new security architecture. On the other hand, Washington is also keenly aware that it would almost be impossible to prevent the rise of China and its expanding influence in the region. Further, Washington also increasingly needs assistance, cooperation and collaboration from Beijing in order to meet many new security challenges that the US alone is unable to deal with. In short, identifying the appropriate place for China in the

25 Joseph S. Nye Jr, "The US role in East Asia Regional Cooperation", *Defense Issues: Volume 10, Number 35-Strategy for East Asia and the US-Papan Security Alliance*. http://www.neat.org.cn/neatweb_en/xsyj/contentshow.php?content_id=56.

26 "Quadrennial Defense Review Report", Pentagon, Washington, February 6, 2006. p. 27.

process of security architecture building could be the central issue to that process, and this presents a dilemma for the US.

Last but not the least is how to strike a balance between the multilateral arrangements the US is closely involved in on the one hand and those that the US would not be able to participate in, particularly owing to its non-East Asian country status, on the other. Traditionally, the US always casts a suspicious eye towards any North-east Asia regional cooperation without its involvement. The US concerns seem particularly to concentrate on the following aspects: one, the development of these cooperative arrangements may derail US designed security systems; two, they may fall under the control of another major power like China, and thus may eventually drive the US out of the region; three, they may undermine or reduce the role of other multilateral regional organizations and initiatives of which the US is a member state.

Japan is another major power whose position is also critical to the shaping of a new security architecture in Northeast Asia in the future. But Tokyo's attitude towards security architecture building is mixed. In history, Japan was the first major power to push for regional integration to achieve dominance in East Asia as part of its competition for hegemony with the Western powers. That colonial ambition fell apart with its defeat in the Second World War. As a result of its miraculous economic development, starting in late 1960s, there was a sustained period of time when Japan, enjoyed virtual leadership in the rapid economic growth of various East Asian economies. During the process, Japan even experienced rising tension in its relations with

the Western countries, the US in particular, in the late 1980s. From Tokyo's perspective, regional cooperation in East Asia under its dominance was always instrumental in shoring up its position vis-à-vis other economic powers outside the region. But the end of the Cold War seems to have given rise to a more complex situation, one to which Tokyo most probably has not been well prepared to adapt. In this regard, there have been several developments that might affect Japan's role in regional cooperation and integration in East Asia in particular.

The first is as mentioned above, Japan's long-term economic depression and China's rapid economic development over the last decade have resulted in a shift of the balance of economic power in Northeast Asia, eroding Tokyo's political influence and economic leading role in Asia-Pacific affairs. The second is the rise of the rightist force at home, which has also resulted in shift in the balance of political force in Japan's domestic environment. The third is Tokyo's re-emphasis of the Japan-US alliance as the cornerstone for security at the expense of the relations with its Asian neighbors.

Under the circumstances, Japan's position towards regional cooperation and integration seems increasingly schizophrenic, which is bound to confront Tokyo with a number of challenges. The first challenge is that Japan must define its own "identity". Does Japan continue to view itself as one of the "Western countries", thus anchoring its security with its alliance with the United States, or view itself as an East Asian country, willing to be more integrated into the Asian community? This issue does not seem to have an obvious solution. The resultant dilemma

of Japan is that while continuing to stress hosting the strong US military presence and maintenance of the US-Japan security alliance as a pillar of the new security architecture, Tokyo has been increasingly aware that its interests are more and more associated with the development of the ties of other East Asian countries. Japan's economy has been increasingly reliant on the Asian market, particularly on its growing interaction and greater trade with China.

Japan's ambivalent feeling towards the regional architecture has also found expression in its great efforts to compete with Beijing for the dominant influence in cooperative progress in the region. The psychological factor plays as much a role as the geo-strategic consideration in the increasing competition between the two East Asian giants. Interestingly, Japan was a very good student learning from Chinese civilization in the history of interaction between the two countries over two thousand years. It was not until the Meiji reforms, which succeeded in making Japan the pre-eminent military power in the region, that China then assumed the role of learning from Japan. This process has continued until today. Thus for over one hundred years, with its huge economic power, many Japanese seem have developed a superiority complex over the Chinese, and take for granted that they are the leader of the region, and that it is others that should learn from them. Now, with the dramatic changes to the situation since the end of the Cold War, this view of affairs has become increasingly obsolete. China is on the rise while Japan seems to be declining in terms of both economic power and political influence in relative terms. Against this background, Japan seems ill-prepared due to the fact that the two strongest major powers in the region will have to

co-exist on an equal footing in the future. That is the reason that Tokyo has been especially articulate in voicing the so-called China threat, making efforts to counterbalance whatever Beijing has been doing. It is indeed most unfortunate that, when the tide of the historical development is calling for the closing of ranks among the East Asian nations, Japan's loss of mental balance could become a major obstacle in the East Asia cooperation and community building.

If the China factor continues to constrain Tokyo's ability to play a greater role in contributing to the creation of the multilateral architecture, some other political and security issues constitute equally major obstacles to Tokyo's efforts to constructively participate in the multilateral regionalism. First of all, Japan's problems in regard to the view of history with China and the two Koreas have always been a bone of contention in its relations with these neighboring countries. Supported by increasing rightist domestic influence, many Japanese politicians, including even government leaders, have repeatedly made inflammatory statements and acted irresponsibly to beautify Japan's colonial and military past, and dodge responsibility for the horrible atrocities perpetrated in the World War II, which have done tremendous damage to the image of Japan as an honest and responsible nation. Although the current leaders seem now to be more sensitive on the national feelings of Japan's neighbors, the root-cause for the rift has been far from being removed.

Secondly, Japan's territorial disputes and conflicts of maritime interests with almost all its neighboring countries, and its intransigent and rigid attitude toward the disputes have made it

extremely difficult to define solutions based on mutual respect and mutual compromise with Tokyo. Thirdly, Japan's recent tendency to emphasize the increasing role of its military force in protecting its security and in solving international disputes has alarmed its neighbors and made some question the basic security approach of Japan towards Northeast Asia. Finally, the rapid evolution of the domestic political landscape seems to have brought about a period of critical restructuring of Japan's political systems. There are currently no parties or politicians that could form a powerful government and implement a forceful and consistent foreign policy. All these problems generate more rather less distrust towards Japan amongst other nations in the region, and add greater complexity to the shaping of the new security architecture.

Russia's role in the shaping of a new security architecture in North-East Asia has often been neglected. But given the vast Asian part of its territory and adjacent sea lanes, Russia has always claimed a great stake in the region. During the Cold War, Moscow once even offered its own plan to create a collective security pact in Northeast Asia to make sure that its vital interests in the region be better protected. But in the confrontational setting in those years, the former Soviet Union's scheme was largely ignored by all the other nations. Today, although Russia has been much reduced in strength and influence, it has still been an influential major power, and continues to be an indispensable factor in creating the sustained security architecture in Northeast Asia. The role of Moscow is chiefly reflected in, among others, the following respects: firstly, Russia has important strategic geopolitical interests in Northeast Asia in terms

of ensuring the security and safety of the sea outlet of its Pacific fleet, and also the peace and stability of Siberia. Heavily squeezed by Western powers in Europe, Russia has now increasingly shifted its attention to East Asia, expressing extraordinary interests in participating in security cooperation in Northeast Asia. Secondly, Russia has huge potential of gas and oil reserves, thus becoming an invaluable energy resource supplier to the region. Thirdly, Russia's military strength and its ability to transfer sophisticated arms and weapon technology to the various states could have significant impacts on the balance of force in the region; fourthly, Russia has major territorial disputes with Japan, the solution of which not only bears on Russia-Japan bilateral relations, but also act as an incentive for further Russian participation in regional community building.

But Russia is also constrained in many ways. Its lack of economic strength often means Russia cannot fulfill its wishes. In addition, the United States and Japan are both vigilant of Moscow's reemergence in the region at the expense of their interests. Japan, in particular, does not seem to welcome Russia's expanding role unless the territorial disputes are solved and its relations with Moscow normalized. Russia, for its part, occasionally demonstrates a pragmatic aspect in its policy in Northeast Asia, and seems to be vacillating on vital issues for its short-term national interests, thus eroding other countries' trust and confidence in Moscow. These negative factors will affect Russia's ability to contribute to the security in the region. They, however, are secondary compared to its potential positive influence in the future. On the whole, Russia will be increasingly an active participant in

solving security issues in the region, playing a positive role promoting the strengthening of peace and stability in Northeast Asia.

China has recently been playing an ever more important role in the security restructuring in Northeast Asia. This is mainly due to China's strategy of peaceful development, characterized by focusing on economic construction and expanding Reform and Opening abroad. This strategy is not based on expediency but a longstanding national policy that Beijing will pursue for generations to come. To achieve this goal, China needs a long-term peaceful, stable and friendly international environment. Northeast Asia occupies an extremely important place in China's strategic calculations. From both a geo-political and geo-economic point of view, China's security largely hinges on the peace, stability and prosperity of Northeast Asia. The goals of China in Northeast Asia assume various forms.

The first of them is the maintenance of regional peace and stability through peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. This objective has become a component part of China's comprehensive efforts to build a peaceful and stable periphery. To that end, China's current focus is on the peaceful resolution of the DPRK nuclear issue. China will continue to be not only an honest mediator, but also an active participant. In collaboration with all the other parties, Beijing is expected to expand its efforts to bridge the differences among the various parties regarding an agreement at the Six-Party talks that is acceptable to all the nations involved.

China's second goal in Northeast Asia is striving for its own national peaceful unification. But the

issue looks more complicated. Unlike the division on the Korean Peninsula, the division of China is purely a continuation of the Civil War of the mid-1940s. The corrupted former Kuomintang-led (KMD) government was defeated, and fled to Taiwan - its final power base. But the KMD government was so fragile and weak that the island would have been soon liberated and the Taiwanese regime would have totally perished were it not for the United States, which sent its Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Straits to block PLA military action immediately after the eruption of the Korean War in 1950. The US move was a gross violation of the fundamental principles of the international law and the product of a Cold War mentality. It is in this sense, the Taiwan question, which drags on to this day, is in essence the consequence of US interference in China's internal affairs. Now, over a decade has passed and much has changed in the global situation since the end of the Cold War. In the hope of maximizing national interests and the overall peaceful regional peace and stability, Beijing has been making the greatest efforts towards peaceful unification based on the formula of one country, two systems. However, at the instigation of outside forces, particularly Washington, the "Independence" movement on the island has also been on the rise in its attempt to split the country, which has not only threatened the prospect of China's peaceful unification, but also jeopardized peace and stability in Northeast Asia.

The situation became particularly challenging during the rein of the sucessionist Chen Shuibian on the island in from 2000-2007. The two sides across the Strait almost came to a military confrontation, as Beijing would never allow the

separation from the mainland in whatever form. When Ma Yin-jiu became the "President" of Taiwan in 2008, taking advantage of the bankruptcy of his predecessor both in his personality and capabilities, Ma seems to want to take a more restrained and pragmatic position in his policy towards the Mainland. In light of the present situation across the Strait, Ma emphasized that he would seek neither independence nor unification, nor use force to change the status quo. In the meantime, he called for closer economic and cultural interaction, and a reduction of military tension, including even the creation of a peace mechanism with the Mainland so as to achieve a win-win result for both sides. Ma also asked for an end to the diplomatic war with Beijing in the international arena, meaning he would not follow Chen Shui-bian's policy of seeking the international recognition of Taiwan as "an independent and sovereign state".

To respond to Ma's somewhat rational position, Beijing also demonstrates its greatest kindness and generosity in return. In a speech to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Mainland's "Message to Compatriots in Taiwan" on December 31, 2008, President Hu Jintao offered six proposals for the peaceful development of cross-Strait relationship. The six proposals include:

- 1) The two sides end hostility and reach peaceful agreements under the one China principle;
- 2) The two sides commence discussions of extraordinary political relations before reunification in a pragmatic manner;

- 3) The two sides step up contacts and exchanges on military issues at an appropriate time, and talk about a military security mechanism of mutual trust, in a bid to stabilize cross-Straits relations and ease concerns about military security;
- 4) The two sides establish an economic collaboration mechanism by agreement that would be mutually beneficial to both sides;
- 5) The two sides take measures to push cross-Straits cultural and educational exchange forward to a broader and higher level;
- 6) The two sides increase communication and exchange in all spheres.²⁷

Hu also stressed:

"Once the two sides reach a common understanding and accordant stance on the principle of one China, the foundation of political mutual trust will be laid and anything can be talked about between the two sides," he said. "Anything that is conducive to peaceful development across the Straits, we will greatly promote. Anything that harms it, we will firmly oppose."²⁸

Obviously, Beijing's attitude towards the Taiwan question has also been more pragmatic and businesslike. The current focus is not on seeking a quick unification but on accumulating common interests and mutual trust and confidence for the two sides. The bottom line is that if conditions for unification are under-developed, China will be content to wait but will adopt resolute

27 Hu Jintao, Speech on the Ceremony in commemoration of the 30th Anniversary of the announcement of Message to Compatriots in Taiwan, Beijing, December 31, 2008. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-10/03/content_10598517.html.

28 Ibid.

measures to counter any attempt to split the nation.

Thanks to the efforts of both sides, the situation across the Strait has been much improved, and tension has been fast reduced. But there are still great uncertainties about Ma Ying-jiu's policy. For all Ma's reconciliatory posture, what his bottom line for the peaceful national unification actually is remains unclear. Meanwhile, the island has been significantly affected by the recent economic crisis. Ma has not lived up to his promise to upgrade Taiwan's economy, resulting in a plummeting domestic approval rating. If the economic predicament does not see a better turn in the next two years, it could be an open question if Ma is able to win the next election. If Ma loses, then the picture is once again clouded with uncertainty.

In a more fundamental sense, the solution of the Taiwan question remains almost impossible without a more positive attitude from the United States. As part of its China policy, Washington alleges that its position towards Taiwan is based on 'One-China policy', namely, the three Communiqués with China. However, it also uses its domestic law - the Taiwan Relations Act - as a justification to interfere in the situation across the Taiwan Strait, implying that it may protect Taiwan if there were a military conflict. This ambiguity allows Washington to stand more on the side of Beijing if Taiwan seeks secession, but may be more on the side of Taiwan if there is a positive tendency towards unification across the Strait. That may serve short-term US interests, but also has the potential to send the wrong signals to both sides of the Strait, and destabilize China-US relations. Under these

circumstances, the US attitude could continue to be an unpredictable variable in the solution of China's peaceful unification, and also the shaping of future China-US relations.

China's third goal in Northeast Asia is to develop constructive cooperative relationships with all the other major powers in the region. In this regard, China and Russia have made fruitful efforts and laid a good foundation for a new state-to-state relationship. China wishes to build the same cooperative relations with both the US and Japan in all good faith. The progress of these trilateral relations, however, is mixed. Looking into the future, China continues to be the weak side in this trilateral relationship. The policy of Beijing is mainly defensive in nature, responsive to the actions by the other sides, while the US and Japan hold the key to the future evolution of the two sets of bilateral relationships, at least in the short term. In this respect, two opposing trends seem to develop. Given the general development of the world and regional situation, it is generally believed that policy makers in both Washington and Tokyo will eventually realize that to cooperate with China is far more in their own core interests than to confront it. But it will be a mistake to underestimate the energy and influence of the anti-China enthusiasm of the neoconservative factions in both countries. Stabilization of China-US and China-Japan relations, in the final analysis, therefore, hinges on the redressing of the balance of strength among the three countries. To put it another way, these two bilateral relationships are able to be stable on the basis of equality and mutual respect only when China further develops and becomes stronger on the basis of its sustained economic development, thus truly enhancing its

comprehensive national strength. This does not suggest that when China becomes developed and strong, Beijing would take revenge and proceed to compete with the US for the dominance of world, or to push Japan into a corner of North-east Asia as a second rate nation. On the contrary, in Beijing's perspective, only when China becomes stronger and developed will there be a more solid material foundation for China to strive for constructive cooperative relationships with both the United States and Japan on the equal footing. Thus, there will be a solid political basis for a sustained security architecture in North-east Asia.

Incidentally, here it might be useful to re-stress the importance of the unification of the two divided nations in the region to the positive development of both China-US and China-Japan relations. As analyzed above, both the US and Japan have historically been the major causes of the separation of China and Korea, they should have a responsibility to help the two nations achieve national unification. They should realize that only then can their core security interests be best protected, and suitable conditions exist for the creation of a sustained and effective security architecture in Northeast Asia in the future.

China's last but certainly not least goal in North-east Asia is to actively push for and participate in regional cooperation. Its position towards East Asian regional cooperation has been evolutionary. Starting in the mid-1990s, Beijing began to participate in multilateral efforts such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and RAR at an official level, and the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC), and the Council of Security Cooperation in Asia-Pacific

(CSCAP) on an unofficial basis. At those forums, however, Beijing acted at first in a very cautious manner, more like an observer than a full participant. But step by step, China evidently sensed the advantages of participating in such multilateral interactions, and realized that East Asian regional cooperation could be the best instrument for achieving the major goals of Beijing's foreign and security strategy. Practical economic interests are clearly one of the driving forces for China's newly-born enthusiasm. However, another factor has played a more fundamental role in precipitating the positive change of China's attitude, and that is its new vision for the behavior in the international arena. Beijing now believes that regional cooperation in East Asia will go a long way towards promoting harmonious coexistence of the diverse forces within the region, maintain regional stability and constitute an important building block for the regional security architecture in the future. These efforts will be crucial for China to build an enduring friendly, peaceful and stable neighborhood so that Beijing finds it possible to concentrate on its domestic development. And, of course, China also hopes that regional cooperation and community building would help lessen the concern of East Asian countries about China's future orientation, as well as greatly relieving US military pressure on Beijing as part of its hedging doctrine.

Like the other major powers, China is also confronted with the same set of "structural problems" as far as security architecture building in Northeast Asia is concerned. Beijing will have to decide to what extent it will accept the US-led security alliances as part of the security landscape in the future. Beijing will have to make

efforts to convince other countries in the region that its rise constitutes great opportunity rather than threats to their security. Beijing will also have to define an effective roadmap for its efforts to realize peaceful national unification while ensuring that the unification does not jeopardize the security interests of other states. All of these are complex issues, but they cannot be sidestepped in China's approach to the process of regional security architecture building.

Preventing 'wild cards' in security architecture building

In addition to the above stated basic elements, there are also a number of issues that could prove to be 'wild cards' in the process of security architectural building in Northeast Asia. Any of these issues could flare up and develop into an unexpected major event seriously affecting the strategic situation in the region.

The current financial crisis stemming from the United States is just one case in point. The crisis has now developed into global financial turmoil. It has extended from the financial sector to the real economy sector, both in the US and almost all other parts of the world, as well as from the economic field to the social and political fields in terms of its repercussions. Worse still, despite all nations being desperate to rescue their economies, the economic crisis seems to be deepening still, and is likely to ensue in the short to medium term. The global economy will experience a relatively long period of painful downturn and adjustment. Northeast Asia has not escaped from the impacts of this unprecedented economic disaster. Last year, Japan, the world's second largest economy, like

the US and Europe, fell into depression and registered negative growth. South Korea has fared even worse. It has not only seen a rapid contraction of its economy, but also experienced the worst foreign exchange crash since the 1997 financial crisis. The South Korean Won declined 32 percent last year amid record selling of South Korean stocks by foreign investors. China, although a little better off, saw economic growth of barely 9% economic growth in 2008, after five years of growth figures above 10 percent. More than 60 percent of China's economy depends on imports and exports. The worsening global economy and contractions in overseas demand have already brought "worse-than-anticipated" risks to its economic prospects.

The present paper has no intention of discussing how Northeast Asian countries should tackle the economic crisis. But suffice to say that the crisis itself has emerged as a wild card that will have significant bearing on the process of security architecture building in the region.

The financial crisis will no doubt reduce the ability of Northeast Asian countries, at least in the short term, to take the major diplomatic steps to solve regional disputes as top of their work agenda will be managing sliding domestic economic growth. Whether this will affect the solution of the nuclear crisis of the DPRK is unclear. In the meantime, as the point of origin of the present financial crisis, the United States has seen its influence undermined in the region. Washington now faces serious questions over its status as a responsible and reliable leader in both the global economy and in the security field. In these circumstances, the US may want to see maintenance of the status quo in Northeast Asia more

than ever since it has no time, or energy, to attend to the major shifts in the security landscape of the region.

But the financial crisis may also have one positive implication. For all the uncertainties it has brought, the crisis also serves to add unexpected but important impetus to closer regional cooperation, particularly among the region's three major countries - China, Japan and the South Korea. On December 13, 2008, leaders of these three countries held a summit meeting at Fukuoka, Japan, to discuss the ways in which that they can work together to enhance effective cooperation in dealing with challenges amid the raging global financial crisis. In a joint statement of tripartite partnership after the summit, they all agreed to make concerted efforts to minimize the negative impacts of the financial crisis on the global economy, facilitate regional trade and investment and promote regional cooperation. Measures to that end include, among other things, an increase in the volume of bilateral exchange arrangements among the three countries; refraining from setting new barriers to investment and trade in goods and services, imposing new export restrictions, or implementing measures inconsistent with WTO guidelines to stimulate exports within the next 12 months; setting up of the Tripartite Governors' Meeting of the three central banks to be held on a regular basis. In addition, in order to counter protectionism, they pledged efforts to reach an ambitious, balanced and comprehensive conclusion of the Doha Round Development Agenda as early as possible.

Previously, these three countries also had held tripartite meetings, but all took place on the side-

lines of the ASEAN-led framework. Thus the Fukuoka summit is the first of its kind, aimed at setting up an independent regional cooperative three-way institution in Northeast Asia. The significance of such a development will be immense, as cooperation between the three countries, which together make up 75 percent of the East Asian economy, will inevitably become a growth engine that counters global financial turmoil, not only in the region but also across the world. Enhanced tripartite economic cooperation will also have significant positive political implications. For the first time, the three countries seem to have decided to show unity and take steps toward better overall relations in the face of the global economic downturn, leaving aside their historical grievances and lingering political misgivings and animosity. The development does not, of course, guarantee smooth sailing in the future evolution of tripartite relations, but nevertheless there is a high probability that economic cooperation and integration of the former rivals and even enemies could gradually lead to political reconciliation and provide a more propitious framework for the security architecture in Northeast Asia - as has been witnessed in the European experience since 1945. The tripartite partnership will undoubtedly constitute another important building block in the future security architecture in Northeast Asia.

Another wild card in the process of the security structuring in Northeast Asia is the possible escalation of one or more of the many maritime disputes in the region. In fact, according to Mark J. Valencia, a well-known maritime security analyst in Kaneohe, Hawaii,

"[m]uch of Northeast Asia is essentially maritime encompassing peninsulas, archipelagos,

disputed islands, strategic straits and sea lanes. These features surround and are embedded in a series of semi-enclosed seas --- the Sea of Japan (East Sea), the Yellow Sea and the East China Sea.”²⁹

Against this backdrop, historically there are numerous overlapping claims of maritime interests, and territorial disputes in the region. This conflict of interests has been particularly compounded by the claiming of 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) and continental shelves by various regional countries, resulting in a sea change in the maritime arena in which disputes between nations have seriously exacerbated relations between them. Recent examples of serious maritime disputes include the Japan/China wrangle over East China Sea boundaries, the Senkaku/Diaoyutai islands, and potential gas in their disputed area; the Japan/South Korea dispute over Takeshima/Tok Do and fish; the Japan/Russia dispute over the Northern Territories/Southern Kuriles and their maritime resources; and the North/South Korea dispute over their western maritime boundary and valuable crabs.

To better protect their maritime interests, almost all these countries concerned have taken steps to escalate maritime military buildup, and developed a multi-purpose navy, tasked not only with ensuring territorial integrity, but also missions like dealing with environmental pollution, protecting resource ownership, as well as fighting against illegal maritime activities, including piracy and potential terrorism. These broader responsibili-

ties and changing priorities for military force structure, operations and training dictate very aggressive arms acquisition programs, including maritime surveillance and intelligence collection systems, multi-role fighter aircraft with maritime attack capabilities, modern surface combatants, submarines, anti-ship missiles, naval electronic warfare systems, mine warfare capabilities, and now missile defense systems, and so on. These systems are often perceived to have offensive capabilities, seen as provocative, and thus destabilizing, particularly by those countries that do not have them and lack the means to acquire them. Moreover, possession of these systems undoubtedly increases the risk of inadvertent escalation in time of conflict. As a result, the maritime arena of Northeast Asia has become a perilous frontier, where a careless miscalculated act could easily erupt into an unintended maritime conflict, rekindling mistrust and arousing nationalistic feeling among the nations in a way not experienced for some time. Indeed, if there is any possibility of a military conflict in Northeast Asia, it may most probably start from a maritime confrontation in the region.

The maritime risk may also have a silver lining though. Keenly aware of the great risks, countries in the region have worked to construct a web of conflict avoidance mechanisms based on an expectation of self-restraint over recent decades. However, all of these agreements are mostly bilateral and on an ad hoc basis. They are vulnerable to any impacts from military actions caused by miscalculations and misjudgments. In light of these weaknesses, the states involved

29 Mark J. Valencia, “A Maritime Security Regime for Northeast Asia”, <http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/07065/Valencia.html>

have now put maritime confidence building measures as one of the top priorities in bilateral and multilateral dialogues. After several serious incidents, Japan and China, for example, have established a mutual "prior notification" regime for scientific research in the East China Sea, while Japan and South Korea are discussing the same for the Sea of Japan/East Sea. Even North Korea's tentative first steps toward rapprochement with the South included agreements on the passage of its ships through South Korean waters and a joint commercial fisheries venture before it renewed its hardline policy towards the Lee Myung-bak administration. Thus, hopefully, with concerted efforts, a multilateral mechanism for maritime security may further be defined, which will not only enhance peace and security in the region, but also constitute an important building block for the overall future security architecture in Northeast Asia.

The third wild card is the evolution of the domestic situation in the DPRK. Although no one has true knowledge about the current on-the-ground situation in that closed and isolated country, it is quite clear that the North continues to have serious difficulty in its economic performance. Despite the efforts made by the government, the country seems still be plagued by serious shortages of food and fuel. Thus, the current confrontational DPRK position towards the West, and South Korea in particular, although understandable in its own right, costs Pyongyang a great deal in terms of receiving foreign aid in a timely manner. If this situation continues, the question is whether the economic quagmire would give rise to social instability, and therefore affect the North's foreign and security policy.

So far, there seems apparent political stability in the DPRK, but the health of Kim Jong-il, the country's paramount leader, poses a serious question of succession. Despite the efforts of the North Korean media to portray the good health of Kim, the outside world does not seem to believe this is the case. Considering Kim Jong-il is approaching old age, Pyongyang has to begin to consider who is going to succeed him in any case, but no figure currently possesses Kim's authority and charisma in the country. Thus there would be huge uncertainties in the immediate post-Kim period in North Korea. Without doubt, a soft landing would be in the interests of all countries, including the DPRK itself. On the other hand, one may have to prepare for the worst outcomes, including the possibility that the death of Kim may lead to a power struggle among the ruling circle, which could lead to social turmoil and even a civil war. Although the scenario looks extremely unlikely for now, if this worst case scenario were to arise, the security implications would be so disastrous that they would inevitably dramatically change the security landscape on the Peninsula, and certainly affect the process of security architecture building in Northeast Asia.

Finally, any major contingencies outside of the region could also be a wild card in influencing the security situation in Northeast Asia. For example, with the focus of the Obama administration's counter-terrorism strategy seeming to move from Iraq to Afghanistan, South Asia could become the central front of the new anti-terror battle field. This may put great political, ethnic and even economic pressure on the South Asian countries, Pakistan in particular. The new situation in South Asia may not only affect relations

in the region (such as relations between India and Pakistan), but also those among major powers (such as China-US and China-India relations). If these relations experience dramatic change, security in Northeast Asia could also be affected as the major players would have to reconsider their threat perception as well as their strategies of interaction.

The way in which the Obama administration deals with Iran's nuclear issue will also have implications for security in Northeast Asia. Unlike the Bush administration, Obama has opted for direct contact with Tehran aimed at achieving a diplomatic solution. But that may also, like the DPRK nuclear crisis, be a protracted process, and offer a stern test to the skills and patience of Washington. If the diplomatic push does not result in any substantial progress, the call for a military solution would soon rear its head in the United States. Meanwhile, Israel is wary that either Washington might strike a deal with Iran at the expense of its own security interests, or Washington might allow the impasse to drift on until Iran succeeds in acquiring all the nuclear material and knowhow for a bomb. Both possibilities would be nightmares from an Israeli perspective. In short, the future in the Gulf also holds many uncertainties, and there is still potential for a major military conflict with huge negative implications for global security, including that of Northeast Asia.

Europe and Security architecture Building in Northeast Asia

Europe is not a party directly involved in the security architecture of Northeast Asia. Never-

theless it has a growing interest in Northeast Asia not only because Europe has seen increasing economic interaction with regional states, but also because many vital security issues in the region could also impact on the security of Europe. On the other hand, Northeast Asia also welcomes the involvement of Europe in regional cooperation as well as architecture building. In that respect, views have long been expressed that Europe could contribute greatly to regional cooperation and integration in Northeast Asia through its own experience of prolonged regionalization.

Thanks to the consistent efforts of European countries for over half a century, 27 sovereign nations as members of a Union today have agreed to abolish their borders; approved a common Constitution; and form a parliament, whose laws transcend the national laws of each of these countries in terms of their authority. All these are indeed almost unthinkable achievements in a region nations bore their grudges against each other so intensely that two world wars erupted in Europe in the last century, bringing untold suffering and damage to mankind.

The success is particularly inspiring to the Northeast Asian countries, as they, too, have been embarking on a course of closer cooperation, and indeed have even entered the initial stages of institutionalized regional cooperation over the last decade. The European experience has naturally become a fashionable subject in the Asia-Pacific. However, this strong interest is evolving into an interesting discourse among Asian nations regarding what they could learn from European integration, or more precisely, to what extent the European experience can be applied

to the context of Asia. Opinion is divided on the issue. Against this backdrop, in learning from the European experience, it is perhaps essential not only to focus on the practical frameworks of European integration per se, but also the specific background against which Asian-Pacific cooperation and integration at large are taking place. In short, how, in light of situational differences, is the European experience to be "Asianized"?

There is no doubt that despite evident differences in almost all aspects of the geopolitical environment as well as historical background, Europe and the Asia-Pacific put the same basic commonalities at the center of their respective integration processes. Or, to put it in a more modest way, the Asia-Pacific has much to learn from emulating the positive aspects of the European experience

First of all, the European countries started their direct integration primarily in the economic dimension, thereby gradually developing increasing common interests among all participants. These common interests became a bedrock for further integrating efforts.

In the wake of the Second World War, the question of how the European security structure was to be shaped was vigorously debated. The consensus reached was that Europe should never revert to the old regional order, based on the rivalry and the balance of force among major powers. But how to define the future in a dramatically different way that would assure sus-

tained peace and stability was a huge challenge. At this crucial juncture, the group of European statesmen that initiated European integration with an extremely insightful strategic vision and great political courage should be given particular credit. On May 9, 1950, the French Minister Robert Schuman put forward a bold plan, proposing "to subject the whole of the French-German coal and steel production to a common 'High Authority' in the shape of an institution open to other European countries that wish to join."³⁰

The plan was readily accepted by the then German chancellor Konrad Adenauer. In April of 1951, the two most important countries in Europe together with Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg formally agreed to the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The event proved to be an enormous fillip as far as the issue of integration was concerned. It became the basis of the deepening of economic interconnections among European nations that ensues to this day. More importantly, it has also provided a more propitious political context in Europe in which the resources most likely to lead to military conflict had been put under the control of a supranational institution. Political suspicion and mistrust against each other were thus vastly diminished. A large-scale war in the region became virtually impossible.

The fact that European integration started with closer economic ties is extremely valuable to the Asian case. In fact, it has been warmly embraced in the region. Even during the Cold War, ASEAN was formed first and foremost with a view to

30 Declaration presented by Mr. Robert Schuman, French Foreign Minister, May 9, 1950 Europa.eu.int/abc/symbols/9-may/decl_en.html.

strengthening economic cooperation among the Southeast Asian countries, a task in which it has so far achieved impressive success. Since the end of the Cold War, regional cooperation in the economic and trade spheres has become the top priority on the agenda of a number of multilateral forums in Asia. Agreements have been reached to set up free trade zones in East Asia between China, Japan and the ASEAN countries respectively. There are efforts now being made to design further economic and financial integration within the next decade. All these progresses bear remarkable resemblances to the terrain that European countries have traversed towards further integration over the last few decades.

Secondly, European integration has been firmly built on the political reconciliation of nations who had traditionally regarded their bilateral relations as of zero sum nature. Indeed, the process of European economic integration has been occurring hand in hand with the process of political reconciliation among the European nations, France and Germany in particular. It is because of this success, Germany has seemed comfortably integrated into the European family. Today, with the rise of the strongest nation in Europe, which looks increasingly keen to play a growing role in the international arena, no European countries harbor serious suspicion or fear of their security interests being fundamentally undermined.

The importance of providing a more favorable political context based on political reconciliation and regional integration should be particularly enlightening to East Asian countries. A growing consensus seems now to emerge in the Asia-Pacific that, like European countries, East Asian

nations should also strive to remold their state to state relations based on better understanding and political reconciliation among themselves, particularly in China-Japan relations, in order to facilitate Asian integration. In this regard, Japan should perhaps especially learn from Germany and its honest introspection over its role in the Second World War and sincere attempts to make amends for the damages to other countries caused by its pre-war behavior. In addition, other Asian nations should perhaps also learn how to turn over an unfortunate page of history and start a new chapter of reconciliation with greater magnanimity and forward-looking approaches. Indeed, there is much for the Asia-Pacific to reflect on from the unique experience of the European reconciliation.

Thirdly, European integration is based on institutionalization and the rule of law, and thereby ought to give exemplary models for Asian integration. Important decisions are made through meticulous preparations and thoughtful calculations in the process of European integration. When views are divided on vital issues such as those involving distribution of sovereignty, referenda are often used as the most democratic and effective way to solicit the political support of the majority in each of the nations. Thus, although the consultation often takes time and lengthens the entire process of integration, it is nevertheless steady and with the fewest collateral damages. Even if conflicting views emerge, there are various mechanisms to efficiently address them. The Asian nations evidently should emulate the mature democratic institutionalization of Europe, particularly once Asian integration reaches a point in the future when sharing sovereignty becomes a central element.

Many more examples of the successful experience of Europe can be cited, all of which are relevant to the security architecture building in Northeast Asia. However, it must also be recognized that not all of the European experience is viable in the Asia-Pacific, owing to specific regional situations. Thus the key to the success of the integration of Northeast Asian nations will depend on their own efforts to define 'the Asian way'. To try to copy the European experience into an Asian context will be bound to fail. Asian integration in the future, for example, will inevitably be different from the European model on the following levels:

Firstly, European integration is in fact an integration of Western civilization in a relatively homogeneous context. Members of the Union are more or less from the same social system, values, and religious beliefs. Standards are laid out to make sure any nations in the region which are not up to the stringent entry requirements are excluded. A debate has even been ongoing as to whether Christianity should be written into the Constitution of the European Union. Although some European nations are vehemently opposed to the coupling of religion with politics, the motion itself indicates a strong penchant for upholding ideology within the European Union. The strength of this peculiarity of the European Union is that it easily generates cohesion and sustainability

among member states. The weakness, however, is that the European Union becomes a very exclusive club, less tolerant of differences and strong in ideology bias. Within the community, this has created problems in accepting some minority European states with different ideologies or religions, thus running the risk of bringing about unnecessary potential instability and conflict in the region in the future.

The time-consuming debate on the application of access to the Union by Turkey is an illustrative example. Despite the assurance of its eventual entry into the European Union, it is generally believed that Turkey's membership may be farther away from reality, if not forever ruled out, primarily because a country with a large Muslim population is not seen as compatible with the European community.³¹

With respect to European external relations, the exclusiveness of the Union may also lead to less sensitivity among member states towards the views and aspirations of other regions, particularly when disputes with developing countries involve profound conceptual differences on issues such as human rights, democracy and the legitimacy of international intervention in another country's internal affairs.

The Asia-Pacific is much more pluralist and di-

31 For the debate on Turkey's accession to the European Union, see, for example, the article "False Obstacles to Turkey's EU Bid" by Kirsty Hughes, *Financial Times*, July 5, 2004. In the article, Hughes highlights the remaining but strong opposition in Europe to Turkey's membership. She points out "(i)n Europe itself, the debate is hotting up. Key political question, including Turkish human rights reforms and civilian control of the military, are under the spotlight... .Opponents of Turkish membership raise doubts beyond the vital democratic criteria. They say Turkey is too big, too poor, not European by culture, geography or history, has dangerous borders, and will damage EU integration through lack of understanding and commitment". But of course, in Hughes's view, all these arguments are not justified. They should not constitute new obstacles to eventual Turkish membership.

vergent than Europe. The region compasses nations with different social systems, historical backgrounds, cultural traditions, and levels of economic development. It is thus unimaginable for Northeast Asia to reach a security architecture based on one type of model of civilization at the expense of others. Undoubtedly, divergence raises difficulties for all parties to reach agreement in their interactions, however it has at the same time taught these countries to learn how to better accommodate these differences and live together in peace and cooperation. Asian nations must therefore guard against rigid uniformity. They should work towards their own mode of cooperation and integration, characterized by greater inclusiveness, better tolerance, and fewer ideological prejudices. Northeast Asian cooperation and integration can be more colorful and richer in its format.

Secondly, European integration still seems to better address its external relations with the two major powers - the United States and Russia. Since the end of the Second World War, European integration has constantly been accompanied by the strengthening of the military-political alliance across the Atlantic in the form of NATO. Many Europeans were grateful to the United States as they recognized that the US had kindly provided a security assurance for them to survive against the Soviet threat as well as to create a security framework for European integration. But, for the Europeans, there was no free lunch. Having provided a leadership role in the security arrangement in Europe, the Americans were successful in ensuring the region came under its firm control. Europe has little independence in its foreign and security policies. Perhaps precisely for this reason, European nations have always been

desirous of speeding up integration in order to acquire greater independence from their 'big brother'. For years, Europe has tried to speak to the Americans with one voice from the alliance. This objective has never been reached despite the progress of European integration, and therefore there were always certain tensions in Europe-US relations even during the Cold War. Tensions have been exacerbated since the end of the Cold War. The rift over the war in Iraq between the two sides has brought home the acuteness of the increasing gap in this most important Western relationship. A fundamental transformation in cross-Atlantic relations has now begun, but as yet remains unclear in its orientation. The Europeans now appear greatly ambivalent as well as divided towards the Americans. This transformation process is bound to be a painful and difficult one, with some uncertain but significant consequences for European integration in the future.

In a different light, Europe has another equally perplexing issue at hand, namely, one of how to treat its relations with that other great power, Russia. Unlike European-US relations, European-Russia relations have always been marked by rivalry and confrontation, which can be traced back through the past several centuries. The deep-rooted suspicion on the part of many European countries towards Russia has largely persisted despite the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, and the rapid improvement in their interactions with Russia. It is ironic, therefore, that while the European Union seems anxious to expand its influence in the East to include all the former junior members of both the Soviet Union and the Soviet alliance, it has categorically rejected the inclusion of Russia into the European Union, leaving the former super-

power completely isolated in Europe, licking its own wounds. The Russians indignantly asked where the borderline of Europe is in the East. And, is not Russia a European country? Both questions are legitimate. But to give a satisfactory answer is both difficult and time consuming. Obviously, Europe needs to define a more sophisticated approach towards Russia or the repercussions could be very negative on peace and stability in the region.

The Asia-Pacific has also been confronting the challenge of managing its relations with the two former superpowers. Thus, the two regions face the same task in identifying the correct role for the two major countries in their respective integration contexts. The result of these efforts will have implications not only for their relations with the major powers, but also on the integration process in these two regions, affecting the world situation for better or worse. However, the situation in the Asia-Pacific is vastly different from that in Europe. Asian nations can certainly learn experience and lessons from the evolution of European policy. It is perhaps through this learning that they should strive to break away from the burden of the Cold War mentality, and reconceptualize Asian relations with both the US and Russia in a new light based on mutual trust and benefit, equality and coordination, as well as harnessing their potentially constructive influence in Asian regionalization.

Last but not least, Europe still seems to produce a more coherent and convincing doctrine that enhances its internal cohesion and solidarity, and also augments its ambition to efficiently

export this vision to the outside world. With 27 sovereign states under one roof, and a few more expected to join in future years, defining a coherent ideological framework will present an ever greater challenge. Most probably, it will prove far more demanding than it is envisaged as being. In fact, today, the European Union is not in a good shape despite its rapid expansion. According to one European analyst, it looks that "Europe's vibrant youth gives way to a gloomy maturity". And he does not seem very optimistic at all:

"On the broader political canvas, governments are still vexed by the complex new geometry of a Union of 25. Fixed stars have been replaced by unfamiliar constellations, robbing political decision-making of its old predictability. The failure of France and Germany to impose their preferred candidate for Commission presidency was vivid confirmation of the change. The Franco-German axis is no longer a sufficient condition for what French diplomats call the construction of Europe. Yet no one is quite sure what might replace it.... To complicate things further, just as the political dynamics have changes, so has the terrain. For the past two decades or so, the EU has defined itself by its great projects: the single market, the euro, a common foreign policy and enlargement among them. Institutional upheaval has served the cause of a more coherent and wider Europe. The constitutional treaty marks the beginning of a different era, one in which the politics of the grand gesture gives way to the unglamorous grind of making the present structures work.... In any event, the present gloom

32 Philip Stephens, "Europe's Vibrant youth Gives Way to a Gloomy Maturity", Financial Times, July 9, 2004.

reflects an inescapable truth: the EU can only be what its member states want it to be. For now, energy and vision have fallen victim to a failure of political leadership."³²

Central to the issue is the debate over the role and status of sovereignty. It is extremely interesting to observe that while on foreign affairs our European friends are tireless in advocating that sovereignty has become an obsolete concept with nations being more interdependent, on domestic matters within the framework of the European Union, member states seem to have been even more energetic in defending sovereignty in each of their own countries during the process of integration. Indeed, the more integration deepens, requiring the sharing sovereignty among member states, the more sensitive each of these members becomes about guarding against the loss of it. After all, integration is no more than a union of sovereign states, not aiming at producing a supra-national government. Thus, no matter how integration progress is achieved, sovereignty remains the last frontier for each of the member states to protect their own national interests. This situation does not look like changing. The European doctrine regarding the role of sovereignty in community building, therefore, does not seem in conformity with the reality of its own actions, nor is the Union consistent when it is debating its own internal and external affairs.

The Northeast Asian nations have attached increasing importance to the issue of sovereignty, because, among other reasons, most of these nations are probably more sensitive to the issue due to their humiliating history in past centuries. The heightened debate was also due to a grow-

ing need to reach consensus on the issue to facilitate future integration, and this state of affairs is ongoing. But the mainstream view seems to argue that sovereignty is by no means an outmoded concept. True, there will be cases in which Asian nations are required to share their sovereignty to promote integration or address their common problems. But the act of handing over part of its sovereignty by a certain nation is itself an act of exercising sovereignty because the decision has to be made by that country on a voluntary basis, with thorough calculations that the returns will be in its greater interests. Based on this understanding, the issue of sovereignty boils down to a basic argument: that the process of distribution of sovereignty must be based on mutual respect, mutual benefit, and equality. It should not be merely an act of imposition on the weak by the strong, as has been vindicated by European integration. Asian nations need to work hard in the future to find out their own way to implement joint sovereignty when necessary, drawing on the European experience.

In short, Europe is expected to be a valuable partner in the process of strengthened regional cooperation and restructuring in Northeast Asia. The Asian countries, in particular, should be humble and earnest in learning from the post-War European experience. On the other hand, the European countries should also take into consideration the characteristics of the Asian context when offering lessons of its own integration.

Conclusion

To sum up, a few observations might be helpful concerning the future security architecture in Northeast Asia:

1. The sustained and effective construction of a security architecture in Northeast Asia is in essence an evolutionary process consisting of the transformation of essentially confrontational relations among the major players into a set of new state-to-state relations characterized by deepening cooperation and collaboration so as to ensure enduring peace, security and co-prosperity in the region. Owing to the current deep-rooted mistrust among the nations involved, it is going to be a long and complex process, in which setbacks or even reversals will no doubt often occur. But as long as these nations demonstrate adequate political will to work together to this end, regional security structuring is on the track.
2. In light of the peculiar diversity and multi-polarity of Northeast Asia, any security architecture in the region cannot be identical to that of the European Union. Arrangements such as the common constitution, common parliament, and common executive body would be inconceivable in Northeast Asia; for the same reason, the Helsinki process may also have its own limitations if applied to the Northeast Asian case. Rather, the Northeast Asian structure is most likely to be a loosely knit network, comprised of various cooperative institutions at different levels, operating in different fields and through different channels. This will exist as a combination of bilateralism, trilateralism and multilateralism. In fact, what has been transpiring in the region is development in precisely in that direction. At a multilateral level, we have the Six-Party Talks; at a trilateral level, various trilateral dialogues have been set up, and more are suggested in the future; at bilateral level, nations are making efforts to strengthen cooperation in light of their specific situations. In addition, a number of non-governmental dialogues and projects have been carried out to supplement the dynamics of multilateralism in Northeast Asia. Although still at the fledgling stage, these efforts taken together constitute the primary achievements of security structuring in the region.
3. Owing to the various co-existent convergences and divergences of vital interests among the major powers both within and outside of the region, the future security architecture in Northeast Asia appears strikingly open-ended and inclusive. While truly regional cooperative institutions such as the trilateral dialogue among China, Japan and the ROK would play increasingly an important role, it is extremely hard, if not impossible, to build a security architecture in Northeast Asia without the participation of external powers, the United States in particular. The good news is that no regional countries rejects the role of the US, or the role of other outside powers like the EU, but, of course, precisely because of the divergent participants in the game, the regional structuring in Northeast Asia will be more complicated and time-consuming than in any other region in the world.
4. Looking into the future, the development of two set of bilateral relationships may be most decisive in bearing on the nature and speed of building the security architecture of Northeast Asia, namely: the China-Japan relationship; and, the China-US relationship. It is no exaggeration to say that these two bilateral relationships become the bedrock of any meaningful architecture in the region in the future.

If Beijing and Tokyo succeed in fundamental ameliorations in their relations, and embark down a cooperative road in good faith, Northeast Asia will then see a chain reaction of true reconciliation among the regional powers, paving the way for multilateralism characterized by mutual trust and respect similar to what happened among the Western European countries half a century ago. Ongoing positive and stable cooperation between China and the United States, on the other hand, would help remove even the most stubborn sticking points in any future misgivings between these two most influential countries in the region, thereby initiating another constructive set of reactions among regional players and creating another condition prerequisite for a sustained and effective security architecture in Northeast Asia.

(January 10, 2009)

About the author:

MG. Pan Zhenqiang (Retired)

Deputy Chairman

Shanghai Institute for International Strategic Studies

