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Session III: CBMs and conflict prevention including arms control and non-proliferation

Remarks on Europe's Possible Contribution to Northeast and Southeast Asian Security

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* The views expressed in this paper are solely the speaker's own and do not represent those of NIDS.

My task here is to respond to the following questions regarding major security issues in Northeast and Southeast Asia with focus on Europe's role, both existing and potential, in CBMs and nonproliferation in Asian security.

What are the major issues in Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia?

What measures have been taken or not taken?

What is the role of regional versus bilateral approaches?

How can Europe contribute?

What are the major issues in Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia?

In Northeast Asia, many security experts would say that the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan Strait security issues are the two major remnants of the Cold War. Although I agree to such a view, I would like to highlight here the issue of North Korea's nuclear and missile development and proliferation as the more pressing one. The cross-strait issue is definitely an important one, but the driving force behind the issue is the longer-time trend of China's rapid military growth that is changing the military balance over the Taiwan Strait. Furthermore, the recent development in the cross-strait relations has brought more "stability" at least on the diplomatic level and lowered the degree of urgency on the military front at least for now. Therefore, I would like to narrow my focus to the North Korean issue, although I will briefly mention other issues when necessary.

Regarding North Korea, I would particularly point out North Korea's military cooperation with Myanmar as an emerging and hard security issue in Southeast Asia as well. North Korea acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) in 2008, but its continued proliferation activities have remained as a common concern among Northeast and Southeast Asian countries. In other words, North Korea's military connections with this region are becoming a kind of critical nexus between Northeast and Southeast Asian regions.

In addition, China's rapid military growth with much contended transparency has continued to be a concern in Southeast Asia as well. Until few years ago, some fear of potential confrontation between China and Japan was felt in Southeast Asia. Nowadays, the improvement of the Sino-Japanese bilateral relationship seems to have eased ASEAN's concern. However, the rapid and massive buildup of the Chinese military, combined with increased activities of Chinese Navy in the South China Sea, has brought about another concern among nations in Southeast Asia, particularly Vietnam.

What measures have been taken or not taken?

In light of the context of this session, I will focus on confidence-building measures, or CBMs, and nonproliferation in the following part of my remarks.

Regarding North Korea's nuclear issue, the current Six Party Talks as a multilateral and cooperative framework have been dealing with the issue. The Six Party Talks established working groups to deal with the more specific issues of North Korea's nuclear development, economic and energy assistance, bilateral relations/normalization, peace and security forum/mechanism in Northeast Asia.¹

As for North Korea's missile issue, there is no formal multilateral framework to deal with the issue. Regarding bilateral frameworks, US-North Korea missile talks were cancelled during the Clinton Administration. The Pyongyang Declaration between Japan and North Korea has been in place since 2002 and was also mentioned in the 2005 text of the Six Party Agreement, but the declaration has not been effectively implemented.

In addition, North Korea's proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and missile-related parts and technologies have been dealt with by US-led Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), multilateral activities among the willing entities. The initiative has provided information-sharing and exercise functions among the participants. Although China has not joined it, Russia and South Korea have agreed to participate in the initiative. Many European countries including UK, Italy, France, and Germany have already been important participants.

Regarding the possibility of CBMs for the North Korean issue, prospects are not so good. The tensions between the US and North Korea and the delayed implementation of the existing Six Party Talks agreements seem to be the current fundamental problem. The Six Party Talks can be seen as involving some kind of CBM processes, but in reality and under the current circumstances, establishing a more institutionalized CBM mechanism seems very difficult.

In Southeast Asia, on the other hand, a number of CBMs have already been tried in the context of ASEAN/ARF processes. Since 1990s, there have been workshops for Managing Potential Conflicts in the South China Sea, ASEAN Ministerial Meetings, ARF meetings, ASEAN-China dialogue in ASEAN+3 (Japan-China-South Korea), ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meetings and so on. The ARF process, in particular, under the step-by-step goal to promote CBMs, preventive diplomacy, and to enhance efforts toward conflict prevention, has provided consultations, concept papers and seminars. While those processes have faced many problems that hinder their further progress, as regional and global security issues grow, the ASEAN/ARF processes began to involve them including terrorism, proliferation of WMD, North Korea, conflicts in the Middle East and so on.

The achievements of the ASEAN/ARF processes cannot easily spill over to the North Korean case. It may take a much longer time for the habit of cooperation, whether moral or pragmatic levels, among Japan, China, and South Korea or within the framework of

¹ The issue of peace regime on the Korean Peninsula or the replacement of the existing Armistice with a peace treaty has separately been treated.

ASEAN+3 could provide another model for regional CBMs in the future. The denuclearization of North Korea, or some kind of settlement to effectively prevent the country's further development of WMDs, should come first.

What is the role of regional versus bilateral approaches?

In responding to this question, just as I focused on CBMs in the above section, I would like to discuss the role of regional and bilateral approaches to CBMs in terms of the North Korean issue.

The agreed objective of the Six Party Talks is to “denuclearize the Korean Peninsula,” and the efforts have been made to achieve that objective comprehensively, diplomatically, and multilaterally. The reality is that North Korea wishes to discuss the nuclear issue primarily and bilaterally with the United States and that the United States has attached importance to the Six Party Talks as well. One would expect that the United States should more pragmatically solve the issue by even partially compromising to North Korea. However, given that the issue is complicated and made up by other related issues and that any solely bilateral approach cannot provide decisive and effective solutions, the regional or multilateral approach might be able to provide at least better-coordinated solutions.

The ASEAN/ARF processes have provided opportunities for dialogue where the participants can see one another's level of willingness or “intentions” through discussions and exchanging views. Collective norms and concepts established in the ASEAN/ARF processes are seen to have laid the groundwork toward building regional security order/community in the future. If the ongoing North Korean nuclear issue were given some kind of settlement, then the similar process could be discussed for the North Korean security issue.

How can Europe contribute?

Under the current situation in which the Six Party Talks remain the main multilateral mechanism to deal with the North Korean security issue, Europe can play only a supportive role. Given that, European countries could individually or collectively strengthen their engagement policy with North Korea in order to help achieve the goal of denuclearizing North Korea and preventing WMDs from the country. Perhaps, European countries could draw on their experiences with the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) which was established in March 1995 during the US Clinton Administration and terminated in the first period of the previous US administration. The idea, in my view, was similar to the so-called Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program. The revival of KEDO or designing a similar program would be an advanced way to deal with the issue.

A CTR method can also be applied to North Korea's missile issue as well. This could be conducted separately from a CTR program for North Korea's nuclear issue or could be combined with it in a more comprehensive cooperative package toward building a security mechanism on and beyond Northeast Asia.

Europe can be involved in either or both programs as it did in the case of KEDO. The case of KEDO was very unique in that it was based on a bilateral agreement between the US and North Korea, the Agreed Framework, and that the organization started as a trilateral implementer (US, South Korea, and Japan) but became a multilateral mechanism. Again, as EU showed its strong commitment to Asian security by joining KEDO as the fourth executive board member, European countries are expected to continue to seek a similar opportunity in the future. As I already mentioned, under the current circumstances, it seems very difficult now for a more advanced CBM process to be established regarding the North Korean issue.

As I have briefly mentioned, another way many European countries have contributed to both regional and global security is their participation in PSI. They have also been making individual efforts as well. Germany, for example, arrested the president of an optical device company who sold critical parts which could be used for nuclear development to a North Korean diplomat named Yun Ho Jin.² Europe's continued efforts in this regard would also enhance the effectiveness of nonproliferation of North Korea's trade of dangerous materials and technologies.

In sum, Europe can contribute to Asian security by continuing its nonproliferation efforts and diplomatic and moral engagement with North Korea toward establishing more effective CBMs in the future.

² The United Nations Security Council listed Yun Ho Jin on July 2009 to be sanctioned under its resolution against North Korea.