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A Review of the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue, 1993-2006

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Introduction

The Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue (“NEACD”) was established in 1993 as the transition to the Post Cold War era led governments in and around the Asia-Pacific region to consider alternative approaches to security.¹ Numerous other Track II mechanisms also emerged around this period, with the Committee for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (“CSCAP”) being among the most prominent. This paper reviews the activities and achievements of NEACD over these past thirteen years and considers its future prospects.

When the University of California’s Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation (“IGCC”) set out to create NEACD in 1993, the region lacked a multilateral forum in which the six principal states in Northeast Asia -United States, Japan, China, Russia, South Korea, and North Korea- could meet to discuss regional security issues. Until the establishment of the NEACD, not even an informal consultative process existed to advance such important objectives. The subsequent creation of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and CSCAP partly, but not entirely, filled the multilateral void in the Asia-Pacific.

How NEACD Works

NEACD meetings consist of plenary sessions and study project workshops. Between 1993 and 2006, there were 17 plenary sessions and 13 workshops (see appendix one for a listing of these events). The two-day plenary sessions move in a round-robin format between participant countries, and take place on average once a year. Study project workshops take place either between plenary sessions or piggy back a plenary session. The round-robin method in which countries share hosting responsibilities ensures that each country actively participates and feels a “sense of ownership” of the process.

As a rule, five individuals make up a country delegation: one policy-level official from the Foreign Ministry and one from the Defense Ministry, one uniformed military officer, and two academics. Generally speaking, we have had Deputy Assistant Secretary-level (“DAS”) participation from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense. Sometimes, due to the pressure of their work responsibilities, the DAS-level officials have sent replacements at the office-director level.

¹ For thoughtful assessments of the development of track II diplomacy, see Brian Job, “Track 2 Diplomacy: Ideational Contribution to the Evolving Asian Security Order” in Muthiah Alagappa (Ed), *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp241-279; Sheldon W. Simon, *The ASEAN Regional Forum Views the Councils for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific: How Track II Assists Track I* (Seattle: The National Bureau of Asian Research), Vol. 13, No. 4 July 2002; Jurgen Ruland, “The Contribution of Track Two Dialogue Towards Crisis Prevention”, *ASIEN*, October 2002, pp84-96; Ralph Cossa, *Multilateralism, Regional Security, and the Prospects for Track II in East Asia* (Seattle: The National Bureau of Asian Research), 1996; and Paul Evans, “Assessing the ARF and CSCAP”, Hung-mao Tien & Tun-jen Cheng (Eds), *The Security Environment in the Asia-Pacific* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), pp154-172.

At NEACD's 17th meeting in 2006 though, foreign ministry officials at the Assistant Secretary-level attended the NEACD plenary session from the US, DPRK and ROK. They used NEACD as a venue with which to conduct an intensive round of sideline official bilateral and trilateral meetings in an attempt to restart stalled Track I Six Party Talks.

IGCC acts as the secretariat for NEACD, providing staff support, soliciting agenda items from participants, and planning the agendas for plenary sessions and workshops. While the institute provides general leadership, NEACD operates on a consensual basis. The process of dialogue and agenda setting is thus a collective effort, creating a certain esprit de corps despite divergence on specific issues.

Although the NEACD agendas and formats have evolved throughout the years to meet the interests of its participants, all NEACD meetings have some elements in common. The first day of each dialogue is devoted to a discussion of the national perspectives on Northeast Asian security as presented by the foreign ministry official. The presentation usually includes the country's policies in the region and its concerns about the policies of other states in the region. A question and answer period follows each presentation. This question and answer session enables participants to express doubts about the positions and actions of each particular government, which then has the opportunity to clarify its positions. This give and take is usually the liveliest part of the plenary and contributes to clearing the air and building trust.

In addition to this regular feature, each plenary includes sessions on specific topics such as the Korean Peninsula peace process, economic cooperation and free trade, freedom of navigation, energy, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the war on terrorism. Sometimes experts on these specific topics are invited to address the group and stimulate discussion.

Another regular feature of NEACD plenary meetings is a lunch for the government officials, who discuss the current status of multilateral diplomacy in the region and when and how to move to a track one process in Northeast Asia. In this respect, NEACD can be viewed as a "track one-and-a-half" process in Northeast Asia.

Study projects hold issue-specific workshops initiated by consensus at plenary sessions. At the workshops, participants focus on national perspectives of specific regional "hard and soft" security issues of interest to them. Political-military issues, for example, include ballistic missile defense and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Economics, trade, the environment, energy, and agriculture are some of the non-military issues that have been discussed under the NEACD. Cooperation on less controversial issues, such as economic and environmental problems, may build the trust needed to tackle more sensitive international security problems. At each NEACD plenary session, a non-military issue is discussed at length and analyzed for its potential for spill-over into other areas of cooperation.

Assessing NEACD's Track Record

By regularizing dialogue in Northeast Asia, IGCC has made it possible for academics, government officials, and other important leaders from the region to come together and forge new relationships and understandings they would not have been able to make at the Track I level. Unencumbered by the official policies of their governments, government participants participating in their private capacities have been free to voice their opinions, ideas, and concerns in a relaxed atmosphere.²

This has provided ample opportunity to explore differences between nations and experiment with new approaches to seemingly intractable issues in an informal setting as well as to develop invaluable personal links between leading security officials. By increasing transparency, this regularized dialogue has contributed to stability in the region. Moreover, NEACD has encouraged key nations with a stake in Northeast Asia to continue seeking to reduce mistrust and avert conflicts through sub-regional confidence and security building measures. NEACD has made it possible for participants to discuss issues that may be too sensitive for government representatives to discuss in an official setting.

While individual country delegations may differ on the issues, they have been unanimous in the belief of the value of NEACD. The ongoing participation of policy-level officials from foreign ministries, defense ministries, and the military in the NEACD process indicates a deepening commitment by member countries to a multilateral process of reducing mistrust within Northeast Asia.

NEACD has benefited from close coordination between the U.S. Department of Energy (“DoE”), which is the principal financial sponsor of the dialogue, and other U.S. foreign policy departments on Asia-related non-proliferation and other policies. Frequent presentations and regular observers from DoE have heightened awareness among other U.S. officials, as well as foreign participants, of the energy dimension in regional security relations. After each NEACD plenary meeting, in-depth briefings are made by senior IGCC representatives to the DoE, Defense Department and State Department to share developments and accomplishments with those who track Northeast Asia for such purposes.

NEACD meetings have discussed and studied an extensive array of issues:

- Several sessions on the challenges of meeting Northeast Asian energy demands, including rising demand, dependence on Middle East oil, and the use of nuclear power.

² See Alexander Lennon, *Why Do We Do Track Two? Transnational Security Policy Networks and US Nuclear Non-Proliferation Policy*, Phd Dissertation, University of Maryland College Park, 2006, Chapter 4, <https://drum.umd.edu/dspace/bitstream/1903/3442/1/umi-umd-3261.pdf>

- The exploration of formal track one regional multilateral diplomacy based on the NEACD model. The study project of academics focused on this prospect produced a set of recommendations that has been shared with all the governments to initiate a track one process, perhaps beginning with a foreign ministers' meeting at the margins of the ARF or the senior ARF officials' meeting. The success of NEACD's six-country formula also has informed the creation of the official six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear problem.
- Through more than a dozen successive workshops on defense information sharing (DIS), NEACD has encouraged greater transparency on military issues. DIS meetings have built relationships among military officers through discussion of issues of common interest to them as professionals, such as force modernization, defense budgets, the revolution in military affairs, and information warfare. Visits to military facilities, such as those arranged at the DIS in Okinawa, Qingdao, San Diego and Tokyo, have added to transparency and improved trust.
- Proposals for confidence building measures that are designed specifically for Northeast Asia. At the time when the DIS project was established, NEACD also endorsed the idea of other projects and workshops on arms control, export controls, and non-proliferation; communications networks, maritime safety and security; and natural disasters and emergency responses. Economic issues and exchanges in non-security related areas were also endorsed as positive reassurance measures.
- The adoption of agreed language for Principles of State-to-State Relations at NEACD VII. After two years of work by a study group of NEACD academics chaired by a Chinese academic participant, the NEACD plenary endorsed these principles, marking a step forward in developing a multilateral framework for cooperation in the region. In addition to statements concerning the respect for national sovereignty and commitment to the peaceful settlement of disputes, the principles are notable for including commitments to human rights, increased transparency on security issues of common concern, and respect for the principle of freedom of navigation.
- A special one-day workshop on the "Economic and Energy Development on the DPRK in the Framework of the Korean Peninsula Nuclear Issue" was held in 2006. A diverse group of economic experts including representatives from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund discussed economic issues for the first time with DPRK representatives. The economic workshop has resulted in the establishment of a new Track II dialogue to encourage North Korea's economic engagement and reforms with the outside world, which has received the approval of the North Korean government.

The Impact of NEACD on China's Engagement with Regional Multilateral Institutions

Along with other track two mechanisms, NEACD has contributed in persuading China about the value of participating in regional multilateral institutions. Before the mid-1990s, China was highly skeptical of engaging with such organizations and preferred instead to deal with its neighbors and major powers bilaterally. But through its involvement with NEACD and other similar organizations, China has become increasingly comfortable and supportive of the role that multilateral institutions play in advancing its interests and promoting its policies.³

One of the main ways that NEACD has been able to influence China's development of its multilateral diplomatic posture has been through the process of socialization, which refers to how participants learn and adopt the guidelines of how to behave and interact in a multilateral setting.⁴ As NEACD founder and convener Susan Shirk has remarked in her experience of the evolution of China's involvement in NEACD: "At the time of the first meeting of NEACD in 1993, it was easier to persuade the North Koreans to come than it was the Chinese; only on the eve of the meeting did the PRC Embassy in Washington D.C. finally agree to send a second secretary to attend. In those early days, the Chinese also vetoed any proposal for study projects or agenda items that might lead NEACD in the direction of greater institutionalization. The young, articulate diplomats from the Asia Department of the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) who began attending NEACD and various official multilateral fora, however, came to recognize that regional multilateral engagement offered China valuable foreign policy opportunities. This group of officials has led the way in convincing their bureaucratic colleagues and the Chinese leaders that cooperation in multilateral settings helps China reassure others about its intentions and avert hostile reactions to its growing power."⁵

Through their participation in NEACD, Chinese diplomats and military officers appear to have enthusiastically embraced the principles and practice of multilateral diplomacy. This can be shown through China's expanding engagement in a wide array of multilateral organizations since the late 1990s. They include the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum, ASEAN Plus Three, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Another indicator of the value that the Chinese authorities attach to NEACD is reference to it in the government's semi-annual defense white paper. The white paper pointed out that "Since the establishment of the NEACD in 1993, China has attended all its meetings, and in 1996 and 1999, hosted the fourth and ninth

³ Susan Shirk, "China's Multilateral Diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific", U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, February 2004,

http://www.uscc.gov/hearings/2004hearings/written_testimonies/04_02_12wrts/shirk.htm

⁴ See Alastair Iain Johnston, "Treating International Institutions as Social Environments", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No.3, December 2001.

⁵ Shirk, "China's Multilateral Diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific".

NEACD meetings in Beijing. China has also worked with other member states and succeeded in getting the NEACD to reach agreement on the guiding principles for cooperation between northeast Asian countries.”⁶ In marked contrast, Chinese military authorities have been reluctant to in the International Institute of Strategic Studies-organized Shangri-la Dialogue, another regional defense-focused track two dialogue.

The Chinese People’s Liberation Army (“PLA”) has been especially eager to participate in NEACD and has sent representatives since 1995, usually between 2-3 officers to each meeting. This has tended to be middle-ranking officers between the ranks of major and colonel drawn from military think-tanks such as the National Defense University and Academy of Military Sciences and from the Foreign Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of National Defense. But as one PLA participant remarked at a recent NEACD meeting, “we are keen to bring officers to the NEACD and DIS meeting so that we can interact in an international forum”.⁷

The Long-Term Potential of Socializing North Korea

A long-term goal of NEACD is to use the experience gained in “socializing” China into the multilateral diplomatic process and apply it to North Korea. By exposing North Korean participants to the transparent, informal, and participatory nature of discussions at NEACD meetings, it is hoped that they will begin to learn and spread these practices and guidelines and apply them when they return home.

In 2002, the DPRK resumed its participation in NEACD. The North Koreans had attended the preparatory NEACD session in July 1993, but did not participate thereafter. The DPRK agreed to send a delegation of diplomats/researchers from the Foreign Ministry’s Institute for Disarmament and Peace to a NEACD meeting in Moscow and DIS workshop in October 2002. The North Koreans subsequently participated in three NEACD meetings 2003, 2004 and 2006.

The behavior of North Korean participants in these post-2002 meetings has already shown some progress in the nature of their participation. At the first NEACD meeting in 2002, the North Korean delegation was reticent to engage in discussions and only one member answered questions. By the 2004 session, the North Koreans were increasingly comfortable and became fully engaged in the give-and-take of the sessions and during meal-time conversations.

The DPRK dispatched its largest and most senior group of participants ever to the 2006 meeting in Japan. The delegation was headed by Kim Kye Gwan, a Vice Foreign Minister and numbered another 8 participants. Other senior DPRK officials included were Amb. Han Song-Ryol, Deputy Permanent Representative of the DPRK Mission to the United Nations in New York, and Mr. Jong Thae Yang, Deputy Director General of the Americas Department in the DPRK Ministry of

⁶ *2000 Chinese Defense White Paper* (Beijing: State Council Information Office, 2000).

⁷ Remarks at the 2006 Tokyo NEACD meeting.

Foreign Affairs.⁸ Most of the North Koreans actively joined in the discussions, asking questions of others as well as explaining their own country's perspective. While the style was open and engaging, the substance of the North Korean remarks though adhered strictly to official positions.

Outside of the official sessions, there was plenty of socializing among participants over meals and coffee-breaks. The North Koreans spent plenty of time interacting with their counterparts from the other five countries, especially the South Koreans. Many participants from Japan, the US and the Republic of Korea remarked that this was one of the first opportunities that they had to be able to get to interact with senior North Korean participants in both an informal and formal setting.

It is too early to say whether North Korea's initial foray into the multilateral diplomatic arena will eventually lead to the strides that China has made. North Korea's closed society and pervasive propaganda and indoctrination apparatus makes any task of socialization immensely difficult. But this access to an informal multilateral diplomatic setting will certainly be helpful in providing additional valuable exposure for its diplomats and negotiators, especially for their participation in the Beijing six-party talks and other multilateral meetings.

The Building of an Epistemic Community

NEACD has been able to develop an extensive network, or epistemic community, of well-connected, influential and well-placed individuals involved in Northeast Asian security matters among the participating member countries both in and out of government. These personal networks have allowed NEACD to establish channels with which to diffuse its ideas, perceptions and information into the Track I process and academic communities.

A number of government participants in NEACD meetings during the early to mid-1990s have since been promoted to senior policy positions. This includes Amb. Fu Ying, China's current ambassador to Australia, who attended several NEACD meetings and US Rear-Admiral William Sullivan, Vice Director for Strategic Plans and Policy on the Joint Staff in the Pentagon, who has been a regular NEACD and DIS attendee since the end of the 1990s.

Views of NEACD from Participant Members

Senior diplomats who have attended NEACD meetings have spoken positively of the forum and its role in forging understanding, strengthening personal relationships and reducing misperceptions. Here are some sample views from prominent participants:

⁸ For an assessment of some of the members of this delegation and their role in North Korean foreign policy, see Kenneth Quinones, "North Korea Nuclear Talks: The View From Pyongyang", *Arms Control Today*, September 2004, http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2004_09/Quinones.asp

- Chinese diplomats have been among the most positive in their assessment of NEACD and its possible linkage to a formal track one process. A Director General of the Asia Department of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, described NEACD at a meeting in 2004 as a “shadow six-party talks” that is a complement to the ongoing official dialogue.⁹ A Chinese vice foreign minister said that while the six-party talks were still too new and uncertain for NEACD to establish any formal relationship with it, should the six-party talks become a permanent official multilateral process for Northeast Asia, then NEACD should become the second-track mechanism for this process.¹⁰ Publicly, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Liu Jianchao told reporters at a regular MFA news conference in 2006 that “China supports NEACD's positive discussion on the security issue of Northeastern Asia and its constructive role in enhancing the understanding and trust between different countries and promoting regional security dialogue.”¹¹
- While US diplomats have expressed mixed views about the effectiveness of NEACD, the general consensus is that it has served a useful role in broadening channels of regional dialogue. One US Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the East Asia and Pacific Bureau, stated in 2004 that “the NEACD meeting was a valuable opportunity to explain what the American position is to the DPRK and other countries, to explain what we meant to say at the official six-party talks. The DPRK clearly was interested in hearing about the nuances of our position, and the information they acquired will feed back into the North Korean process. It was valuable to get out of the straitjacket of the official six-party talks.”¹²
- The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ 2003 *Diplomatic Bluebook* stated that “issues concerning security are vital matters directly connected to the peace and safety of the people and although dialogues between governments have a tendency to announce the official position from beginning to end, with NEACD there is the comfort of non-governmental level meetings, and participants can put their frank opinions and questions on the table, recognized differences in opinion that come from differences in culture and systems, and deepen their mutual understanding. ... NEACD through a free exchange of views is expected to contribute to the promotion of mutual trust and confidence-building that will become the foundation for peace and stability in Northeast Asia”¹³

⁹ Remarks at NEACD meeting, Qingdao, April 2004.

¹⁰ Remarks at NEACD meeting, Qingdao, April 2004.

¹¹ “Foreign Ministry Spokesman Liu Jianchao's Press Conference on 6 April 2006”, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/fyrth/t244864.htm>

¹² Personal correspondence with Susan Shirk, NEACD Convenor, May 2004.

¹³ The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Diplomatic Bluebook of 2003* (Tokyo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004), <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2003/chap3-a.pdf>

- Among all the NEACD country members, the Republic of Korea (“ROK”) has been the most enthusiastic supporter of NEACD. In particular, the ROK’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (“MOFAT”) has sought on a number of occasions to turn NEACD into a Track I dialogue.¹⁴ Among MOFAT initiatives include turning the second half of the second day of the NEACD plenary meetings into a Track I format.
- While the DPRK’s participation in NEACD and Track II dialogues in general has been spotty, a senior DPRK foreign ministry official who attended a NEACD session in Tokyo in 2006 spoke positively about Pyongyang’s assessment of this dialogue. Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye-Gwan pointed out that the DPRK is “a founding member of the Northeast Asian Cooperation Dialogue”, and noted that “we have put importance on this dialogue and under the circumstances, we are putting even greater importance on [the Tokyo meeting]”. Kim concluded that “through two-track diplomacy, we are seeking to contribute to the security of Northeast Asia.”¹⁵

Sustaining NEACD: Financial Support

An important ingredient of NEACD’s longevity has been its access to a reliable source of funding. The DoE has covered the costs of the running of NEACD since its inception. However, with cutbacks in US government support for international diplomatic activities in the past few years, which has also impacted on DoE’s support for NEACD, IGCC has sought to widen financial support from other participating countries. The ROK and Japan have been willing to make sizeable funds to cover the costs of meetings when they are held in their countries.

In recent years, IGCC has also raised funds from non-profit foundations to undertake supplementary meetings and studies that enhance the core DoE-funded portion of the NEACD dialogue. In 2003, the Stanley Foundation supported a bilateral dialogue on the future of U.S.-DPRK relations. This dialogue provided a valuable opportunity for former officials and scholars from the DPRK and the U.S. government to engage in a candid exchange of views. A special one-day workshop on economic and energy development in the DPRK was held ahead of the 2006 Tokyo NEACD plenary meeting and was sponsored by the Carnegie Corp.

Future Prospects for NEACD

NEACD’s near-term prospects appear bright, although there are uncertainties on the horizon. The most recent NEACD meeting in Tokyo in 2006 was the largest and most ambitious of the NEACD sessions and was the catalyst for an intensive

¹⁴ Lee Jong Won, “The Possibility of Regional Security Framework on the Korean Peninsula”, <http://law.rikkyo.ac.jp/hogaku/61/61-Lee%20Jong%20Won.pdf>

¹⁵ “North Korea Envoy: Restart of Nuclear Talks Up to US”, *Reuters*, 7 April 2006.

round of sideline meetings by senior diplomats from many of the countries who participate in the Track I official Six Party Talks. It also attracted plenty of media interest with more than 100 media organizations covering the event.

The Tokyo meeting also led to the establishment of a new Track II dialogue looking at North Korea's economic engagement and reforms with the outside world. This will see the organization of a number of workshops and research trips between NEACD member countries and participants from DPRK economic specialists.

Discussion has also taken place among government officials from the NEACD member countries about the forging of closer linkages between NEACD and the Six Party Talks process, such as in the establishment of expert study groups to examine issues that may eventually be a focus for negotiation in the Track I arena. However, this issue has been clouded because of the uncertainty surrounding the future of the Six Party Talks, which has been in limbo since September 2005.

Growing skepticism over the long-term sustainability of the Six Party Talk process may see NEACD continue to be active for some time to come. Susan Shirk has stated that she was willing to consider allowing NEACD "to go out of business" if the Six Party Talks evolved into a regularized Track I multilateral mechanism.¹⁶ But the likelihood of the Six Party process developing into an institution such as the ARF appears slim as long as the North Korean nuclear issue remains unresolved.

¹⁶ Lennon, *Why Do We Do Track Two?* p206.

Appendix I: NEACD Plenary Sessions and Workshops 1993-2006

Plenary I:	October 1993, La Jolla, CA. Planning Meeting.
Plenary II:	May 1994, Tokyo.
Plenary III:	April 1995, Podmoskovie, Russia.
Plenary IV:	January 1996, Beijing.
Workshop:	January 1996, Meeting Energy Demand in Northeast Asia.
Plenary V:	September 1996, Seoul.
Workshop:	September 1996, Seoul. Principles of State to State Relations.
Plenary VI:	April 1997, Harriman, New York.
Workshop:	October 1997, Honolulu, HI., Principles of State to State Relations.
Plenary VII:	December 1997, Tokyo.
Workshop:	May 1998, La Jolla, CA. Wired for Peace: Using the Internet for Regional Security Cooperation.
Workshop:	July 1998, Seoul. Defense Information Sharing.
Plenary VIII:	November 1998, Moscow.
Workshop:	December 1999, Beijing. Defense Information Sharing.
Plenary IX:	December 1999, Beijing.
Workshop:	November 2000, Tokyo. Defense Information Sharing.
Plenary X:	November 2000, Seoul.
Workshop:	March 2001, Seoul. How to Move to a Track one Process.
Plenary XI:	October 2001, Honolulu, HI.
Workshop:	October 2001, Honolulu. Defense Information Sharing.
Plenary XII:	April 2002, Tokyo.
Workshop:	April 2002, Okinawa. Defense Information Sharing.
Plenary XIII:	October 2002, Moscow.
Workshop:	October 2002, Moscow, Defense Information Sharing.
Plenary XIV:	September 2003, Qingdao.
Workshop:	September 2003, Qingdao. Defense Information Sharing.
Plenary XV:	April 2004, La Jolla.
Workshop:	April 2004, La Jolla. Defense Information Sharing.
Plenary XVI:	April 2005, Seoul
Workshop:	April 2006, Seoul, Defense Information Sharing
Plenary XVII:	April 2006, Tokyo
Workshop:	April 2006, Tokyo, Defense Information Sharing.
Workshop:	April 2006: Economic and Energy Development on the DPRK in the Framework of the Korean Peninsula Nuclear Issue