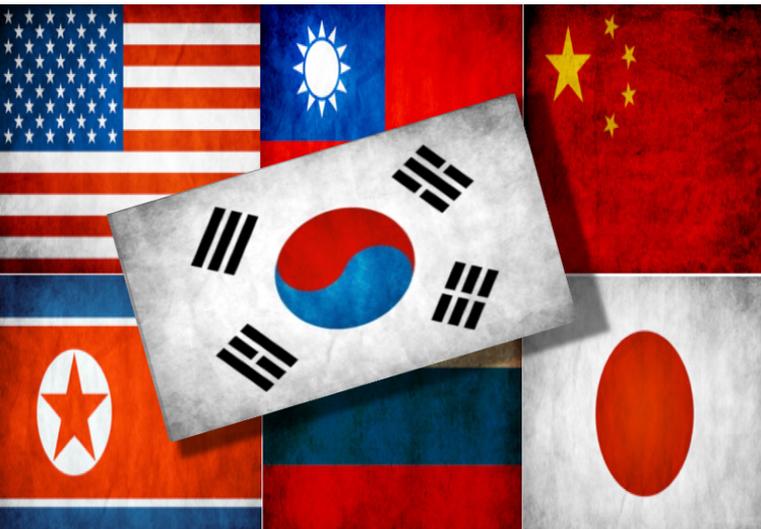


South Korea: A Driver for Cooperative Security in Northeast Asia?

Bernt Berger



With regional security trends in Northeast Asia tending towards rising uncertainty and risk, the region is urgently in need of a new security model. This paper outlines why South Korea must assume a pivotal role in engaging regional actors and actively shaping the security architecture towards a more cooperative approach. But while Seoul's Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative represents a good start, argues *Bernt Berger*, it faces a number of obstacles that need to be addressed if it is to become a more effective format.

The current security situation in Northeast Asia entails a high degree of uncertainty for regional actors. The rising influence of China as a potent economic and military player and the disappearance of a recognized status quo in regard to the regional security order have triggered a trend that is not uncommon for regions that face gradual multi-polarization: the resurfacing of contested issues and unmistakable reflexive shifts towards bipolar alignments with China or the United States.

Factors such as longstanding territorial disputes, unresolved maritime borders, and jingoistic nationalisms among all countries are cause for conflict, and have even paralysed regional trends towards more formal economic integration. During the past decade, furthermore, rising uncertainties about the security situation and protracted conflicts in the region have triggered an increase in arms procurement. The key to the problem is that the issue of a viable security

architecture (including corresponding mechanisms) has never been seriously addressed. Indeed, despite the grand strategic scenarios and animosities over historical and territorial issues, there has hitherto been a lack of urgency to resolve security issues in Northeast Asia. Real political initiative among regional players, or outside-the-box thinking about how to deal with their immediate neighborhood, has so far been lacking.

With only one exception: South Korea. Under the current government, headed by President Park Geun-hye, a range of initiatives have been undertaken, notable among which is the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI). There are many good reasons why Seoul should seize the moment and pull its weight in regional security affairs. South Korea enjoys a good standing and relatively strong diplomatic

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relations with most of its neighbors in Northeast Asia. Excepting North Korea, only diplomatic relations with Japan have been soured by historical and territorial issues. Furthermore, as a middle power with considerable economic weight, it exercises significant influence in the region. By contrast, China and Japan have, by and large, prioritized their national agendas while failing to take the lead in multilateral cooperation. Last but not least, due to the situation on the Korean Peninsula, South Korea has a vested interest in becoming a key player in regional security affairs.

This paper first analyzes existing approaches (and failures) to regional security before examining regional particularities and offering suggestions on how the existing efforts of immediate regional actors—principally South Korea, China, and Japan—need to be bolstered in establishing cooperative security structures. In so doing, it will highlight the role of South Korea in taking the lead in such efforts, the obstacles to doing so, as well as more generally the primacy of security building in Northeast Asia.

Japan: Tipping the Scales in Regional Security

Japan's government under Prime Minister Shinzō Abe has made concrete steps in changing its defense posture and security profile in broader East Asia. Recent moves in this direction—analyzed below—have sent mixed signals to the outside world, particularly in its neighborhood.

In July 2015, a parliamentary committee vote adopted a proposal to reinterpret Article 9 of Japan's constitution; the security law was subsequently enacted in September. Up until this point, the constitution had prohibited the use of military force other than in cases of self-defense. After the adoption of these changes, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces are now able to engage in "Collective Self-Defense." The move practically enables them to aid allies, the U.S. in particular, in case of armed conflict and to strengthen their alliances. In April 2015, furthermore, the U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines were released in which the parameters for cooperation were set in case of a military attack against Japan. While the document fell short of naming bilateral cooperation in situations

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that impact the U.S.'s security, reinterpretation of Article 9 means that such measures can be more clearly defined for certain circumstances. Additionally, the guidelines provide for a standing "Alliance Coordination Mechanism" for enhancing operational coordination and strengthening bilateral planning.

Elsewhere, the Japanese government has committed itself to providing Vietnam and the Philippines with maritime equipment including civilian patrol boats; deals with Australia over diesel engine submarines and seaplanes to India have also been under consideration. The move is an internally and externally sensitive one. The government in 2014 started revising the principles of a self-imposed arms export ban from 1967. As a makeshift solution, the transfers were handled as foreign aid and capacity building and in conjunction with low interest loans. Externally, the shift towards quasi alliance building and defense cooperation with the Philippines and Vietnam, two countries with similar territorial issues with China, is not well regarded in Beijing.

In sum, in view of a rising China, Japan has made concrete moves to strengthen its defense ties with the United States. Moreover, engagement and de facto al-

liance building with Southeast Asian countries are in the making. In so doing, Japan is pushing the regional security architecture further towards a collective security system¹ which, intentionally or not, is abetting a bipolar order. Although Japan's approach can be attributed to strategic preparedness, it has not undertaken any recognizable steps towards security co-operation beyond regional balancing; and whereas its 2014 National Security Strategy mentions cooperation for building

“As China confronts its littoral neighborhood with facts, its foreign policy concepts and mottos might have lost their persuasive power.”

an intra-regional order, mainly within the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) framework, this has been undermined by a lack of initiatives and poor relations with China and, to a lesser extent, South Korea.

China: Edging Ahead with Ambiguous Ambitions

All rising powers encounter suspicions as to what their international ambitions might be. China is no exception. Over the past decade, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has reiterated its commitment to cooperative security and dialogue and its opposition to alliance building. The Chinese Military Strategy white paper, published by the State Council in May 2015, did not substantially change this approach. However, Beijing has so far done little to promote efforts to actively introduce Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) in reaction to the security situation, and commitments to cooperative security structures have hardly gone beyond the declaratory stage.²

Beijing has therefore not diffused uncertainties about its intentions and security goals in its East Asian neighborhood. This has been most obviously the case in maritime Southeast Asia, where China has used a “forked-tongue” approach. On the one hand, Beijing has emphasized its peaceful intentions and the defensive posture of its naval capacity building that includes guaranteeing the security of sea-lines of communication.³ On the other hand, its actions such as building artificial islands on reefs (which include military bases

with PLA Navy and Air Force facilities as well as engaging in submarine activity) is evidence of China actively asserting its influence and interests which, in so doing, overrule territorial claims by other littoral countries. As a result, China's actions have not helped to maintain trustful neighborhood relations in East Asia as a whole, including Northeast Asia, with there remaining big question marks over China's intentions. Indeed, as China confronts its littoral neighborhood with facts, its foreign policy concepts and mottos might have lost their persuasive power.

Instead, China has focused rather on military-to-military relations, CBMs, and strategic dialogue with the United States. Desired measures in China's 2015 white paper include “strengthen[ing] defense dialogues, exchanges and cooperation, and improv[ing] the CBM mechanism for the notification of major military activities as well as the rules of behavior for safety of air and maritime encounters, so as to strengthen mutual trust, prevent risks and manage crises.”⁴ Such measures would indeed help to improve the security situation between the U.S. and China as the key players in Asian security. But with Northeast Asian neighbours, conversely, initiatives have been lacking. And yet, bilateral initiatives solely between the two major powers without a gradual process involving other regional actors serve to disempower them, and will fail to lead to a comprehensive process that might bear fruit in the mid to long term in terms of creating sustainable security structures. Counterproductively, Japan and South Korea are forced to make strategic choices between the two rivals for regional influence.

In sum, China is a key player in building regional security structures and engaging its neighbors. Yet, as China has sent mixed signals, the situation demands for more than diplomatic reassertions. Isolated CBMs are less important than concrete and systematic moves towards reducing security risks. As such, regional mechanisms inclusive of all actors (not just ad hoc bilateral initiatives) and initiating building viable security structures would represent steps in that direction.

South Korea: Taking the Bull by the Horns?

In the absence of China or Japan being able or willing to initiate building a regional security architecture,

South Korea has no alternative but to play a more central role. Four arguments are elaborated below which support such an assertion: geopolitics, South Korea's rising influence as a middle power, the indivisibility of regional security and the situation on the Korean Peninsula, and the need for an exclusive Northeast Asian format.

First, the Korean Peninsula has historically been at the center of geo-political considerations in the region. Any deterioration of the security situation would have dire consequences for South Korea's security and economy. Moreover, South Korea has historically been confronted with power struggles and domination in its neighborhood. Due to "geographic disadvantages," handling competing powers has become an inevitable part of the foreign policy of any South Korean government. During the past couple of years, close diplomatic relations with China at the highest level have sent a clear signal to North Korea that regional priorities, particularly on the part of China, had changed. But at the same time, Seoul needs to consider perceptions and interests in Washington in order to maintain a stable military alliance, which is crucial in guaranteeing its own safety.

For smaller states, balancing bigger powers consumes large diplomatic resources and often runs into irresolvable contradictions. Most recently, President Park Geun-hye's prominent appearance during China's military parade to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII served South Korea's interest in pursuing strong relations and cooperation with China. Yet in Washington, the move was received with mixed feelings. Conversely, U.S. pressure to install a THAAD anti-ballistic missile system on South Korean soil would inevitably pose great challenges in Seoul's relations with Beijing. Thus, for Seoul the only way forward in handling its dilemmas is a pro-active approach towards regional security affairs and taking the initiative in cooperative security.

Second, as a middle power with considerable economic interest in stability, South Korea is forced to pull a greater weight in international and regional affairs. It relies on the safety of international networks including transport routes (sea-lanes, flight corridors),

international communications, as well as trade and commerce. Thus, Seoul's diplomatic challenge is to establish itself as a network hub transcending the conflict lines that exist in its neighborhood. At the same time, this challenge is a chance to manifest its role in the region and influence economically and diplomatically harmful conflict narratives. It is therefore in South Korea's interest to create real integrative structures that might strengthen common interests.⁵

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Third, due to the situation on the Korean Peninsula and the involvement of other regional players such as China and the U.S., South Korea has a vital interest in cooperative security and mechanisms that make it possible to influence the security situation and make it more predictable. Unpredictable security trends and greater bipolarization have an impact on the situation on the Peninsula and would inevitably bring in more geopolitical considerations that are against South Korean interests. Indeed, Pyongyang has felt increasingly threatened by the uncertain regional security environment involving a strengthening of U.S. alliances and military cooperation as well as a changing Japanese military posture. Therefore, multilateral security cooperation has a pivotal role to play in making progress on resolving the nuclear disarmament issue on the Peninsula as well as implementing measures and safeguards in order to improve confidence and assuage negative security perceptions.

West Germany's experience is instructive for South Korea in this regard. A dual simultaneous approach of *Ostpolitik* (bilateral engagement of the Eastern bloc countries) and promoting international dialogue and negotiations (Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe or CSCE process) was necessary to achieve its security interests and to promote inter-German rapprochement efforts. Since neutrality was not an option at the time, the only way forward

was to become proactive. South Korea is facing a similar reality and needs to find a solution that suits both the regional situation and its security needs.

Fourth, in order to achieve desired results, it is key for South Korea to geographically frame regional security architecture in Northeast Asia. It is therefore imperative for Seoul to separate sub-regional issues from Southeast Asian security issues and arrangements such as the East Asian Summit and ASEAN Plus formats. Bringing in unrelated issues, such as territorial conflicts in the South China Sea and Freedom of Navigation operations in disputed areas, would only serve to water down any efforts among key players in its own neighborhood.

The combination of South Korea's political needs and the situation of its international environment calls for serious proactive policy responses. On the one hand, it needs to establish a workable multilateral cooperation format that separates regional security cooperation from issues on the Korean Peninsula. On the other hand, in order to prevent cross-cutting disturbances between the two domains, both types of effort need to be coordinated in a comprehensive approach. Although NAPCI is clearly a move in direction of cooperative and comprehensive security, it will still have to stand that test.

NAPCI: Can it Deliver?

Like previous South Korean governments, President Park's administration has continued efforts to promote regional structures that would promote its security interests involving the abovementioned factors.⁶ One of the key initiatives that has been put forward is the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative. The first high-level inter-governmental meeting on NAPCI was subsequently held in Seoul between South Korea, the U.S., China, Japan, Russia, and Mongolia on October 28, 2014. The UN, EU, and NATO attended as dialogue partners.

NAPCI is a dialogue format that initially aims to institute a cautiously defined process of promoting cooperation in less sensitive, non-security related fields.⁷ As part of its larger Trustpolitik concept, the

Park government seeks a way forward in sub-regional cooperation that would include all kinds of interests and eventualities. As such, it has considered the need for a process, complementarity with existing initiatives, and the need for changing mind-sets. In theory, therefore, the concept of NAPCI is a commendable textbook example, explicitly drawing from the European experience, for a comprehensive process towards regional security cooperation based on a trust-building process.

As such, South Korea is expending considerable effort in marketing the concept among its neighbors and potential extra-regional partners. During the recent November 1 Trilateral Dialogue held in Seoul, China and Japan welcomed NAPCI and agreed to further develop it. Nevertheless, it is too early to say whether NAPCI will ever take off as potential hold-ups exist in the way the concept was conceived: namely, the strong emphasis on trust building rather than security building, the lack of a roadmap, and the issue of ownership.

During the 2nd High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting on Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation held in Seoul on October 28, the participants agreed on cooperation in functional areas. These include nuclear safety, energy security, environment, disaster management, cyberspace, health, and drugs; albeit concrete measures have so far not been named. While a model within the selected framework that takes into account nearly all options and eventualities can serve as a useful toolbox, NAPCI largely lacks reference to currently existing security issues. Instead it follows a careful approach based on selected elements taken from the European Cold War experience. As such, the concept focuses on building confidence as a means of changing mind-sets rather than engagement in order to set up policy-networks and build security. Due to this priority on trust building over security building, the process risks failing to win full recognition among neighboring governments.

Furthermore, whereas the process as such serves South Korean needs to take things into its own hands, it lacks any kind of roadmap that would reconcile its own interests with regional interests as well as serve

the needs on the Korean Peninsula. With rising geopolitical competition and historical differences in the region, the approach will run into obstacles, which will be difficult to surmount. Additionally, South Korea's ownership of and central role in the format will be difficult to transform into a regional one. Only successful common initiatives will provide the necessary incentive to broaden cooperation.

Since NAPCI refers to a range of named and unnamed European initiatives ranging from the Helsinki process, the formation of the OSCE, to EU integration, it is necessary to clarify understanding and applicability of the European experience during the Cold War.

European Lessons and Northeast Asian Realities

The example of Cold War Europe shows that the risk of nuclear war posed an existential threat that none of the parties could ignore. Thus all relevant parties came to the table in order to undertake the necessary steps to make the situation more predictable. Consequently, the Cold War blocs engaged in parallel processes of rapprochement (CSCE process) and nuclear disarmament ranging from the 1963 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty to Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty II (SALT-II) in 1979.

The CSCE process (basket model) involved Mil-to-Mil Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs) from the very beginning. These primarily consisted of transparency measures, which included notification on military maneuvers and the sharing of information on conventional military activities involving more than 25,000 troops on European territory and adjoining sea areas and air space. Additionally, the Helsinki Accords encouraged voluntary invitation of observers.

Somewhat counterfactually, however, the conventional wisdom today regarding European Cold War history is that CBMs over “softer” issues laid the basis for rapprochement and security cooperation. However, this obscures a more complicated reality. In fact, various processes and measures were in fact implemented simultaneously. What does this mean then

for the realities of the situation in Northeast Asia and NAPCI in particular?

The strategic environment in Northeast Asia is in flux. Lengthy processes and experiments with trust-building based on “soft” issues ignore the fact that the situation is evolving and that ad hoc arrangements for communication and transparency are already underway, typically only on bilateral levels. Thus, any model or initiative needs to tangibly address issues of security and building transparency from the outset. However, instead of trying to devise strategies to build, for example, integrated control mechanisms for issues such as nuclear energy (i.e. NAPCI for example refers to the EURATOM example) as a vehicle, there has been a lack of willingness to define concrete measures on all sides. There has been therefore too little focus on security building related to the current situation. Accordingly, bold moves towards practical security cooperation that serve to assuage uncertainties deriving from current trends are key if NAPCI is to become more credible.

Second, the concept of the “Asian Paradox” has gained increasing currency and also found expression in South Korean official statements. The underlying theoretical liberal assumption is that countries whose economies are increasingly interdependent cooperate politically and are less likely to engage in war. The “paradoxical” situation in Asia is, so the argument goes, that (military) tensions have increased in spite of a high level of economic transactions. But this should not necessarily be viewed as a contradiction. In the past, economic dependencies between Northeast Asian countries have in fact led to greater distrust. For example, allegations in 2008 of poisoned dumpings led to a distrust in the safety of Chinese products in Japan. And whereas territorial disputes have had a negative impact on trade and investment relations,⁸ it is not the case that economic relations have had a positive influence on dispute settlement. The situation is exacerbated by the seemingly insurmountable historical differences between South Korea, China, and Japan, which have been reproduced in mass culture and education with varying degrees of intentionality and political expediency.

The European experience shows that, in fact, the

process was far more complex than a simple spillover from economic to political cooperation. Economic integration in Europe, such as the European Coal and Steel Community, had an explicit political purpose of containing war-relevant industries. Growing economic interdependencies in the European Community were

“For trust building to be effective it needs to be embedded in a broader, comprehensive security-building process.”

gradually integrated and regulated in a common market. It was thus not the sum of economic transactions that created the need for political cooperation but the integration process itself. In parallel, a whole range of targeted but uncoordinated political initiatives among countries in post-war Western Europe, ranging from education and people-to-people exchanges to addressing history, have helped to largely minimize historical differences.

Third, a crucial element in regional rapprochement and security cooperation is political will and decision-making. In Europe moves by individual German leaders towards Ostpolitik were often not well regarded, neither among their domestic constituencies nor by Cold War allies. Nonetheless, rapprochement processes were built on well-established networks not only among top leaders but also networks between administrations. The establishment of such networks necessitates engagement on security issues among relevant institutions. Here Northeast Asia is facing major obstacles. With the U.S. pivot making headway in re-establishing influence targeting intelligence and policy-making communities in the region, the relevant networks are increasingly exposed to competing interests and goals between the major actors.

In sum, the development of cooperative security structures in Europe was based on multiple processes. Due to the perceived urgency in face of Cold War nuclear risks, all sides possessed the requisite political will to engage in efforts towards such. Accordingly, the main lesson is that during the process of European East-West rapprochement, hard security measures were addressed from the outset and were complemented by soft trust-building measures. It is not the case

that the latter trickled up into more substantive cooperation. While the South Korean approach through NAPCI will inevitably have to adapt to the Northeast Asian situation, it nonetheless needs to avoid what can be termed the “Asian Trust-building Trap.” That is, ad hoc agreements resulting from summits (and which lack a long-term perspective) are no substitute for the building of proper regional security mechanisms and structures. For trust building to be effective it needs to be embedded in a broader, comprehensive security-building process. It is this fact that should be a key lesson for Northeast Asia when viewing the European experience.

Towards a Comprehensive Multilateral Framework?

From 2003 until the process became stalemated in 2008, the Six Party Talks were the most effective regional format in Northeast Asia. However, with a focus limited to issues on the Korean Peninsula, the format was not a prelude to broader regional security cooperation structures. And whereas since the stalling of the Talks, all parties have paid lip service to the need for regional cooperation, initiatives have not gone beyond the declaratory level. At present, Northeast Asian security “structures” are mainly based on summitry and bilateral or trilateral agreements as outlined in Box 1. While some have resulted in workable measures and part of ongoing CSBMs, others have fallen victim to ill-will during diplomatic rows. Notwithstanding, existing efforts and mechanisms have not delivered the desired results, least of all predictability and reliability. The question is whether exclusively bilateral achievements can lay the basis for a broader engagement as well as binding regional mechanisms. The South Korean approach to create a comprehensive multilateral framework could therefore form an alternative to otherwise uncoordinated summitry. South Korea and Japan in particular cannot leave it to the most influential players alone to determine how regional security is developing.

Yet, having previously highlighted the potential shortcomings of NAPCI, it is also necessary to identify the challenges to pursuing comprehensive security cooperation. For South Korea this primarily lies

Box. 1. Existing Security Cooperation

- So far, U.S.-China security cooperation exists in a range of military and non-military fields including counter-terrorism, disaster relief, transport safety, illicit nuclear and radioactive materials trafficking, as well as over the Korean Peninsula and Iran. More specifically, the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue entails a strategic track with military components that have helped introduce concrete measures. The Strategic Security Dialogue is a high-level civilian-military meeting and serves to communicate strategic issues and interests. The so-called New Model of (Major Power) Relations between the two countries also involves high-level exchanges. In 2009, China and the U.S. introduced a mil-to-mil exchange program and in 2014 China was invited to the annual RIMPAC exercises.⁹ At a declaratory level, an MOU was signed in 2014 involving a range of CBMs. Both sides agreed, for instance, on Rules of Behavior for the safety of air and maritime encounters in order to prevent misunderstandings and miscalculations. Upon implementation, the two parties will consider additional notification mechanisms. This could involve notification of major military exercises. Hitherto, however, notification mechanisms have been voluntary and therefore non-binding.
- Since China and Japan (and, to lesser extent, Japan and South Korea) are the main adversaries in territorial disputes in Northeast Asia and unintended confrontation is most likely between the two navies, codes of conduct and security mechanisms are essential. The so-called Japanese East China Sea crisis mechanism was first proposed in 2007 and became a tool for maritime communication. Negotiations over the consultation mechanisms started as early as in 2012 but came to a halt after rising tensions over Senkaku/Diaoyutai; in 2015, bilateral dialogue was resumed and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has called for high-level dialogue on the issue. The mechanism is supposed to be a preventive measure and shall facilitate communication in case of incursions into territorial waters within the EEZs.
- Trilateral summitry between South Korea, China, and Japan in various locations has been on the agenda since 2012. The format was supposed to provide a framework outside of ASEAN+3 and focus mainly on economic and political dialogue. In May 2015, the foreign ministers of the countries held their 7th Trilateral Meeting in Seoul. All sides declared their willingness to continue their efforts of holding official trilateral summit meetings. In early November 2015, a trilateral meeting involving President Park, Prime Minister Abe, and Prime Minister Li Keqiang took place in Seoul. Despite the modest attempt to reinstate the trilateral process, a comprehensive Joint Declaration for Peace and Cooperation in Northeast Asia was in fact adopted. With the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) still in place in Seoul and the so-called VISION 2020, a declaration of the three parties on a comprehensive set of measures from the third trilateral meeting in May 2010, the parties could continue where they stopped three years ago. Additionally, a Trilateral Cooperation Fund (TCF) was discussed in order to back up cooperation formats financially.

in three points addressed in turn below: influencing heavyweights, namely the U.S. and China; the coordination of various cooperation formats; and making these binding and comprehensive.

The U.S. and China are the principal drivers of regional security trends. However, neither has shown any interest in regulating security affairs on a regional level. Instead, the trend is towards greater strategic preparedness. Furthermore, while negotiations address strategic mistrust between the two countries,

the results rather serve “great power relations,” a fact not necessarily in the interest of smaller states. Thus, a key question is whether Seoul will be able to influence decisions in Beijing and Washington in regard to the direction of regional security.

Given that multilateral coordination becomes an accepted practice, there is no guarantee that it might be any more effective than existing efforts. On the one hand, bilateral tensions and disputes may be diffused if part of a comprehensive multilateral process and the

range of issues is broadened. On the other hand, the lack of urgency in a multilateral setting, agendas that are too broad, the addition of other bilateral rivalries, and a lack of commitment may all hamper meaningful advances. In order to prevent watering down any initiative, Seoul will inevitably have to focus on existing issues between the countries in order to make the format security-relevant and meaningful particularly for the regional powers.

As identified above, it has been the growing pains of East Asian security cooperation in general that regional security cooperation has been based on diplomatic rapprochement rather than building tangible mechanisms from the outset. More informal processes at establishing mechanisms have therefore lacked much-needed bindingness. So far, in East Asian regionalism as a whole the idea that norms could regulate international cooperation and behavior has not found approval among governments. Instead, ad hoc cooperation and consultation are still common practice.

Conclusion

South Korea has indeed a role to play and it is in its own interest to support regional solutions for security cooperation. Yet, Seoul will be confronted with considerable obstacles, not least that it relies on the cooperation of other countries. Furthermore, although the NAPCI initiative has been well thought out, it needs adjustments if it is to acquire greater persuasiveness and traction. Key to this is placing the stakes much higher from the very outset. Instead of focusing on a trickle-up approach in the form of soft security measures, it is the process of concrete security cooperation itself that might lead to greater results and the gradual establishment of a viable security architecture.

Seoul would also be well advised to consider the merit of existing formats and mechanisms. For instance, Mongolia has in recent years increased its efforts to raise its profile in regional security cooperation and architecture building. In its so-called Ulaanbaatar Process for Dialogue in Northeast Asia, which held its first meeting in June 2015, the Mongolian foreign ministry created its own forum to address regional security. Mongolia maintains good relations with all

regional actors and is not involved in any of the current disputes. For this reason, it is also able to bring North Korean representatives to the table, who have so far been excluded from the NAPCI format. Given that a Mongolian foreign ministry representative attended NAPCI's recent 2nd High Level Intergovernmental Meeting, it would be beneficial to find synergies between the two formats. Second, in order to make NAPCI more concrete, the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) in Seoul could initially assume a central role in coordination and initiation of joint initiatives. As a common mechanism it would also be a means to broaden the ownership of NAPCI.

In conclusion, hard security issues need to be directly addressed and appropriate measures taken that help to make existing security risks more predictable and which enhance communication and transparency. In so doing, the putative "Asian Paradox" can be transmuted into the creation of security structures *despite* seemingly intractable historical differences.

Notes

¹ Collective security systems are arrangements on various geographic levels wherein all states accept the security of one is the concern of all. All members commit to collective responses to aggression. Cooperative security refers to a security approach whereby states work jointly in order to ameliorate security issues, reduce tensions and suspicion, mitigate disputes, build confidence through agreed mechanisms and institutions, as well as promote cooperation in development and economy.

² Notably, Chinese academics had propounded the idea of turning the Six Party Talks on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula into a broader regional mechanism. However, this foundered after the talks stalled in 2008.

³ During his state visit to Washington in September, Xi Jinping emphasized that installations on disputed islands in the South China Sea would not be militarized

⁴ See Chapter VI, China's Military Strategy, available at: http://www.china.org.cn/china/2015-05/26/content_35661433_7.htm.

⁵ So far, formal trilateral economic integration between China, Japan, and South Korea has not occurred. Talks on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) were agreed on in

KEY POINTS

- Initiatives to build cooperative security structures in Northeast Asia based on binding mechanisms and transparency measures have, by and large, not taken root. China's increasingly assertive posture, Japan's reinterpretation of Article 9, and the U.S.'s pivot to Asia are furthermore driving regional security trends towards rising uncertainty and risk.
- Neither the U.S. nor China have shown any interest in regulating security affairs on a regional level. While negotiations between the two countries may seek to address strategic mistrust, the results serve "great power relations" rather than the interests of smaller regional states.
- Northeast Asia is in need of the establishment of proper regional security mechanisms and structures based on cooperative security. As the European Cold War experience demonstrates, this requires a security-building approach that seeks to address hard security concerns among all relevant actors from the outset. Bilateral agreements and ad hoc summitry in Northeast Asia have been insufficient in this regard.
- South Korea as a middle power has a central role to play in promoting a regional security architecture. While its Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative holds potential, it places too much emphasis on trust building through prioritizing cooperation over soft security issues and lacks broader regional ownership.
- Seoul will face a number of challenges in promoting a regional security agenda. These include influencing the U.S. and China as the two regional heavyweights, coordinating various cooperation formats, and making these binding and comprehensive. Nevertheless, it should seek synergy with other formats including the Ulaanbaatar Process for Dialogue in Northeast Asia and the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat.

2012 and the first official talks took place in Seoul in March 2013. In the wake of gradually resurfacing territorial disputes between China and Japan, however, the talks stalled. To date, South Korea has signed a bilateral FTA with China (in June 2015) and is continuing talks with Japan.

⁶ In 1993, the San Diego-based Institute for Global Conflict and Cooperation (IGCC) set up the North East Asian Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD). The Track II format was designed to develop new alternative approaches to the post-Cold War security order in the region. The format involved Japan, China, Russia, South Korea, and North Korea. South Korea strongly supported the format and sought to transform the format into a Track I dialogue. It succeeded in complementing the Track II format with official meetings. Moreover, already in 1994 South Korea had proposed a more focused official effort in the form of a Northeast Asian Security Dialogue (NEASD)—a six-party format that had been discussed in South Korea since the 1988 idea of a Consultative Conference for Peace in Northeast Asia. The project failed, however, due to lack of Chinese and U.S. support of the cooperative security effort.

⁷ See background paper explaining NAPCI published by the South Korean foreign ministry at: http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/North_Asia/res/eng_2015_0310.pdf

⁸ In 2013, for example, South Korean grocers threatened a boycott of Japanese products due to tensions over the disputed Dokdo/Takeshima islands.

⁹ These are the world's largest international maritime military exercises held in the Pacific Rim region.

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