

Policy Forum 06-39A: Making Progress While Marking Time

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"Making Progress While Marking Time"

Essay by James Goodby and Markku Heiskanen

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I. Introduction

James Goodby, former U.S. ambassador to Finland, and Markku Heiskanen, an Associate Senior Fellow at the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) in Copenhagen, write, "Europeans can make a unique contribution to peace in Northeast Asia: they have shown that multi-national cooperation really works. Its example complements the American emphasis on power relationships, which is also

a reality in today's international system."

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II. Essay by James Goodby and Markku Heiskanen

- Making Progress While Marking Time
by James Goodby and Markku Heiskanen

The present deadlock in the Six-party Talks on the North Korean nuclear issue shows no signs of easing and this is blocking much needed multilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia. Last November, at their meeting in South Korea, President Bush and South Korean President Roh endorsed the idea of an organization to promote security and cooperation in Northeast Asia. There is general agreement that the Six-party Talks could evolve into such an organization. But a multilateral mechanism is needed now to help head off an Asian Cold War. First steps toward creating it could be taken in parallel with the Six-party Talks, which should continue to focus on North Korea's nuclear weapons programs. Currently, the only way to proceed is through an accretion of cooperative programs. There is no need, and no time to wait, and no need for unanimity.

Practical steps, particularly in the economic field, can form the nascent framework for such a mechanism. These steps also have merit in themselves. There are several potential areas for cooperation where the presence or absence of North Korea as a political entity is not a major factor. They include:

- certain sectors of economic cooperation such as development programs in Siberia, where Russian natural resources, South Korean capital and technology, North Korean labor, and Chinese and even Japanese markets could find a synergy;
- programs that could enhance transportation and energy cooperation, as for example the development of the Europe-Northeast Asia railway networks within an established multilateral forum, including an eventual financing consortium;
- cultural programs, especially those that encourage closer collaboration in interpreting historical events;
- certain security programs such as cooperative anti-proliferation and counter-terrorism activities.

A systematic and coherent policy, or at least a compelling vision of the future, is needed if sectoral cooperative efforts are to grow into a genuine institutional framework to deal with fundamental security interests and objectives. Unless the nations involved in Northeast Asian affairs come to share a vision that sees all the potential programs of cooperation as steps on the way to a larger goal, the individual programs will be valuable, but not *transformative* .

A corrective to this problem would be to organize a multilateral steering committee involving as many of the governments represented in the Six-party Talks as care to participate. Other Asia-Pacific organizations could do this but they are not focused on Northeast Asia nor are they concerned with establishing a mechanism for security and cooperation in Northeast Asia.

The European Union should participate because it is a serious economic player in the region. This steering committee could promote more effective multilateral cooperation. More significantly, it could help to guide all the nations towards the long-term goal of a comprehensive security

community. Of course, the ultimate success of the Six-party Talks will be essential to the realization of this goal. Otherwise, North Korea's nuclear weapons program will limit that country's full integration into a Northeast Asian community.

The European Union is well positioned to take the lead in this initiative. Finland will hold the presidency of the EU from July 1 to December 31, 2006, and will host the Asia-Europe Summit (ASEM) in Helsinki this coming September. The Summit offers a good opportunity to discuss this initiative. Germany will take over for six months on January 1, 2007. Both nations have important stakes in Eurasia and a vision to match. This could be the "Year of Asia" for the EU.

The EU need not limit its role to that of a cheer-leader on the sidelines. The European nations have been major donors of economic and humanitarian aid to North Korea. But demands for a "no say - no pay" policy in the region are increasing in Europe.

European experience with reconciliation and multilateral organizations has a special resonance in Asia at this moment in history. Both Finland and Germany have strong credentials in these fields. Willy Brandt's policy of reconciliation with Germany's eastern neighbors paved the way to the ending of the Cold War in Europe, and to the reunification of Germany. This policy made it possible to realize the Finnish initiative on the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which led to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975. Germany has been China's biggest trading partner in Europe and experience with German reunification has been carefully studied in South Korea.

Europeans can make a unique contribution to peace in Northeast Asia: they have shown that multi-national cooperation really works. Its example complements the American emphasis on power relationships, which is also a reality in today's international system. Northeast Asia needs both elements to create a security community. Now it is Europe's turn at bat.

III. Nautilus Invites Your Responses

The Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this essay. Please send responses to: napsnet-reply@nautilus.org . Responses will be considered for redistribution to the network only if they include the author's name, affiliation, and explicit consent.

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