



TOWARD AN ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN NORTHEAST ASIA



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JAMES GOODBY AND MARKKU HEISKANEN

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I. INTRODUCTION

In this essay James Goodby and Markku Heiskanen argue that: "It is clear that a multilateral mechanism that would promote dialogue among nations is now badly needed in Northeast Asia. Not that dialogue alone will remove the distrust that prevails in the region, but the absence of dialogue has caused misunderstandings and may cause serious miscalculations. Europe pioneered multilateral mechanisms that helped end the Cold War and preserve peace on the continent. Something like that will be required to set the stage for settlements in Northeast Asia."

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II. NAPSNET POLICY FORUM BY JAMES GOODBY AND MARKKU HEISKANEN

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Northeast Asia is high on the agenda of the new Biden administration. This is underlined by the first high level visits to Washington after President Joe Biden took office. The first visitor was Japanese Prime Minister Suga in April, and the second was South Korean President Moon in May.

The Biden-Putin meeting in Geneva on 16 June will have global repercussions. Their agreement to resume bilateral strategic stability talks will give fresh impetus to nuclear negotiations in Northeast Asia. If that is followed by an agreement to revive the Iran nuclear deal, pressure will mount to solve the North Korean nuclear issue. Biden-Putin discussion on red lines for cyber attacks might also resonate with North Korea, which US intelligence believes was responsible for the attack on Sony Pictures in November 2014, and numerous other damaging cyber attacks worldwide.

North Korea was a major topic of conversation during President Moon's visit to Washington. And for good reason: the North Korean nuclear program is a potential threat not only on the Korean Peninsula and East Asia, but globally. There is a possibility South Korea and Japan could go nuclear if the problem is not solved in the near future, which would have serious repercussions for the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. Another conventional conflict on the Korean Peninsula would be a disaster even beyond the region; a nuclear war would be a catastrophe for humanity.

Biden's new approach to North Korea was confirmed during the Biden-Moon summit. The main goal remains the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The US and South Korea hope to re-engage North Korea in negotiations through a calibrated, practical approach based on the Biden administration's month-long review of North Korea policy.

Biden is trying to move beyond the failures of the past, including President Obama's strategic patience and President Trump's top-down approach. To help drive that effort, Biden has appointed veteran State Department official, Sung Kim (who was born in Seoul and grew up in Los Angeles) to serve as US special envoy for North Korea. Sung Kim served in the same role under Obama and helped set up Trump's summits with the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un. After recent consultations in Seoul with South Korea and Japan, Ambassador Kim said the United States was ready for meetings with North Korea without pre-conditions.

President Biden said in a press conference during Moon's visit to Washington in May that a summit with Kim Jong-un is possible, but it would have to take place on different terms from Trump's headline-grabbing but ultimately fruitless summits. The US position is that the North Korean leader must commit to a discussion about his nuclear arsenal, and allow his advisers to meet with their US counterparts to lay the groundwork ahead of such a summit.

For his part, Kim Jong-un has indicated that he is open to discussions. Speaking on 17 June to the Central Committee of the Worker's Party of North Korea, he said his government should get ready for both dialogue and confrontation. He said this in the context of declaring that he had made a detailed analysis of the new US administration's policy towards his country.

Although it is positive that both leaders have stated they are willing to engage, it would be a mistake to focus discussions solely on the nuclear issue. Experience has shown that nuclear agreements are fashioned in the context of changing political and economic relations. This is likely to be the case in Northeast Asia as well. Some of the preparatory work that could lead to change has already begun in the form of documents that previous American, South Korean, and North Korean representatives have signed in various configurations. These should not be viewed as relics of the past but as a storehouse of valuable tools that should help solve negotiating problems.

It is clear that a multilateral mechanism that would promote dialogue among nations is now badly needed in Northeast Asia. Not that dialogue alone will remove the distrust that prevails in the region, but the absence of dialogue has caused misunderstandings and may cause serious miscalculations. Europe pioneered multilateral mechanisms that helped end the Cold War and preserve peace on the continent. Something like that will be required to set the stage for settlements in Northeast Asia.

Some of the documents created in earlier negotiations with North Korea could prove useful. The most recent of these is the Singapore document of June 2018, agreed by President Trump and Kim Jong-un, which provided an agenda for further discussions and studies.

President Moon of South Korea has stressed the relevance of the 2018 Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity, and Unification, signed by him and Kim Jong-un, during Moon's visit to North Korea in May 2018. It called for "a permanent and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula" and steps "to realize through complete denuclearization, a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula".

A document agreed in 1992 by Kim Jong-un's grandfather, Kim Il-sung, and President Chung of South Korea, deals with reconciliation, non-aggression, and cooperation, somewhat along the lines of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. This 1992 North-South agreement contains ideas that could be enshrined in a regional organization for security and cooperation in Northeast Asia, covering not only security but also civil society interaction.

So too does the US-DPRK Agreed Framework of 1994, under which North Korea pledged to freeze its nuclear program in return for energy aid. An international consortium called the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) was formed to implement the agreement. Finland, which championed the talks that led to the Helsinki Final Act (the founding document of Europe's post-Cold War international order), was an individual member of KEDO. An organization like this, oriented toward assuring energy supplies in Northeast Asia, could be a part of an organization for security and cooperation in the region.

These are examples of useful concepts that can be revived to help solve a geopolitical problem that could otherwise have devastating consequences. It is an urgent task, not one that can be postponed. The North Korean nuclear arsenal threatens its immediate geographic area but also has global consequences in terms of generating nuclear proliferation pressures and increasing the chances of a devastating nuclear war.

III. NAUTILUS INVITES YOUR RESPONSE

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