

Policy Forum 11-005: Two Tracks to Peace and Security in Northeast Asia

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Two Tracks to Peace and Security in Northeast Asia

By James Goodby and Markku Heiskanen

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I. Introduction

James E. Goodby, former US Ambassador and Special Representative for Nuclear Security and Dismantlement and Affiliate of the Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies at the Brookings Institution, and Markku Heiskanen, former Finnish diplomat who is currently Senior Associate of the Asia Institute in Daejeon, South Korea, suggest a two-track approach for dealing with the North Korean nuclear program. First, a North-East Asia Energy Development Organization should be formed to provide multilateral "nuclear fuel services" if the DPRK "re-commits to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)" and confirms the "dismantling of its nuclear weapons program." Second, the ROK and DPRK should "start negotiations... to define definitively the frontiers between the two states" and eventually establish a peace treaty between the two Korean states.

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II. Article by James Goodby and Markku Heiskanen

-“Two Tracks to Peace and Security in Northeast Asia”

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To focus narrowly on North Korea’s nuclear weapons program is to effectively suspend negotiations aimed at achieving peace and security in Northeast Asia. And this is what we have seen for at least two years, while North Korea’s nuclear weapons program has gained momentum.

A mix of economic and security measures will be necessary to solve the perennial Korean crisis. A functional, economics-based multilateral approach focusing on integrating the DPRK into the regional economy of Northeast Asia would be one prong of the policy. The other prong would be an effort to move beyond the 1953 Korean armistice agreement to a broader political settlement.

Currently, U.S. policy has been described as “strategic patience,” and patience is certainly called for, but not at the expense of seriously looking for ways to thaw this frozen conflict. The European post-war experience of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), founded in 1951, has lessons that are still useful in the present stalemate.

The insight of French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman and his intellectual collaborator, Jean Monnet, was that if Franco-German production of coal and steel were placed under a common High Authority, it would plant the seeds of peace between Germany and France. Today’s European Union traces its origins to Schuman’s declaration of May 9, 1951, celebrated today as “Europe Day”.

The functional equivalent of the ECSC in Northeast Asia would be a Northeast Asia Energy Development Organization. A version of such an organization was established in 1995 as the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), in which also the EU participated, to fulfil the 1994 US-DPRK Agreed Framework. KEDO was terminated in 2006 after evidence of uranium enrichment activities in North Korea was revealed.

A new and more comprehensive energy organization could include China, Russia, Japan, the United States, the ROK, and DPRK. The EU might also participate in some fashion. The mandate should be to promote energy security in Northeast Asia and contribute to economic development. It should have a standing secretariat; broad oversight should be provided by a Council of Ministers. The European Atomic Energy Community’s charter suggests some relevant missions.

The provision of nuclear fuel services could be multilateralized within this framework, allowing the sharing of both North and South Korea in the ownership and the output of one or more nuclear fuel service facilities in China, Russia, and Japan. The condition must be, of course, that the DPRK re-commits to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), including its status as a non-nuclear weapon state. And that means a confirmed dismantling of its nuclear weapons program.

It is unlikely that the DPRK would accept rolling back its nuclear weapons program even to acquire the maximum benefits that might be conveyed by an Energy Development Organization. And here we come to the second track for peace and security in Northeast Asia.

Two serious incidents in 2010, the sinking of the South Korean corvette Cheonan and the bombardment of South Korean island of Yeonpyeong raised tensions between North and South Korea to levels not seen in decades. The most urgent diplomatic task is to prevent this tension from developing into a larger-scale military conflict. The most promising approach is to revive a process leading towards a final peace treaty.

The first step could be to start negotiations between the two Korean states on an interim agreement, one objective of which would be to define definitively the frontiers between the two states, perhaps reviving at least part of the 1992 Basic Agreement between the two Koreas, in which that specific issue was addressed: “The South-North demarcation line and the areas for nonaggression shall be identical with the Military Demarcation Line provided in the Military Armistice Agreement of July 27, 1953, and the areas that each side has exercised jurisdiction over until the present time.”

Neither an interim agreement nor a peace treaty process can proceed very far without commitments

by the United States. In addition to close consultation between Washington and Seoul, direct and permanent high-level contact between the US and DPRK should be opened in connection with the inter-Korean talks, so that as a result of the negotiations, the United States could become the guarantor of a bilateral agreement between North and South Korea.

The Six-party Talks contained the elements of such a strategy but that framework was de-railed by North Korea's own two-track strategy: a secret uranium enrichment project running in parallel with its open plutonium projection plant. Will sanctions exact a toll that eventually will force North Korea to give up its nuclear ambitions? "Strategic patience" implies that but this approach has not worked in the past and will not work now, largely because China will not let it work. And so, painful though it may be, it is time to revisit the negotiating option.

III. Nautilus invites your responses

The Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this essay. Please send responses to: bscott@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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Nautilus Institute

608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email:

nautilus@nautilus.org