

Prospects for Northeast Asian Multilateral Security Cooperation

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A broad variety of multilateral security dialogue mechanisms has emerged in the Asia-Pacific region in recent years. These efforts at building trust and confidence, both at the official and at the non-governmental or so-called "track two" level, have the potential for enhancing Northeast Asian regional security. All Northeast Asian nations express support for such efforts. The current trend toward multilateralism is also generally consistent with U.S. foreign policy objectives in Asia, albeit as an important complement to America's bilateral security arrangements (which remain the foundation of U.S. security policy in Asia).

An Overview

Foremost among the official mechanisms is the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which brings together the foreign ministers of the Association of South East Asian Nations (Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) and of other key regional players (Australia, Cambodia, Canada, China, Japan, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Russia, South Korea, New Zealand, the United States, Vietnam, and the European Community) — twenty-two members in all — to discuss regional security issues. This annual ministerial gathering, first held in 1994, provides a clear signal of the growing broader regional commitment to multilateral security dialogue throughout the Asia-Pacific.

At the subregional level, the most prominent official effort is the Four Party Talks, among North and South Korea, China, and the United States, which formally began in early December 1997 in Geneva, some twenty months after being originally proposed by then-South Korean President Kim Young Sam and U.S. President Bill Clinton. The Four Party Talks have the specific aim of replacing the current armistice with a formal Korean peace treaty, ending the state of war that has existed on the peninsula for almost five decades. The talks are also intended to develop and pursue confidence-building measures between North and South Korea.

Another multilateral governmental effort of great significance is the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), the multilateral vehicle established by the United States, the Republic of Korea (ROK), and Japan to implement the October 1994 Agreed Framework between the United States of America and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The Agreed Framework and KEDO are aimed at achieving "an overall resolution of the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula." Their broader mutual goal is the promotion of peace and stability and the eventual peaceful reunification of the peninsula.

Other multilateral mechanisms aimed at enhancing Asian-Pacific security also exist at the nongovernmental or track-two level. Most prominent among them are the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) and the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD).

CSCAP was established in June 1993 to provide a structured process for regional confidence building and security cooperation among countries and territories in the Asian Pacific region, through the linkage of regional security-oriented institutes. CSCAP, while predating the ARF, is now focusing its efforts on providing direct support to this governmental forum while also pursuing other track-two diplomacy efforts.

The NEACD's aim is to enhance mutual understanding, confidence, and cooperation through meaningful but unofficial dialogue among China, Japan, Russia, the United States, and both South and North Korea. While North Korea has not participated in any

of the eight formal NEACD meetings held since October 1993, the NEACD has been fruitful nonetheless, bringing together senior officials, academicians, and security specialists from the other five countries for discussions on political, security, and economic issues of concern to all parties.

This paper will review the efforts of these five major initiatives from an admittedly American perspective. I will also briefly review selected other efforts either focused on or impacting upon Northeast Asia before discussing the benefits and some limitations to multilateral security dialogue in Northeast Asia. Special attention is paid, where appropriate, to maritime cooperation as a potentially fruitful area of future multilateral security cooperation in Asia.

The successful establishment and generally productive results to date of the ASEAN Regional Forum and KEDO, the promise (as yet unfulfilled) of fruitful engagement of the DPRK in the Four Party Talks, and the willingness of government officials to actively participate (in their private capacities) in such track-two organizations as CSCAP and the NEACD provide ample evidence of both U.S. and broader regional acceptance of, and official governmental support for, multilateral security dialogue.

American policymakers continually stress, however, that U.S. support for increased regionalism is built upon the premise that such multilateral efforts complement or build upon, and are not seen as a substitute for, enduring bilateral relationships. The current U.S. bilateral military alliance structure — including the basing of U.S. forces in Asia as a visible manifestation of America's security commitment to its allies — serves as the "linchpin" and "foundation" for U.S. security strategy in East Asia. The central role of U.S. bilateral alliances in general, and of the United States-Japan security alliance in particular, as the linchpin of America's national security strategy in Asia was reaffirmed in the Pentagon's December 1998 East Asia Strategy Report (EASR).¹

Some U.S. policymakers, especially within the Defense Department, remain concerned that a few regional proponents see multilateralism as an alternative to the American bilateral alliance structure. Chinese officials in particular have questioned the relevance

of these U.S. bilateral alliances — “leftover vestiges of the cold war” — and see multilateralism as the new security paradigm.

From a U.S. perspective, however, bilateralism and multilateralism are not mutually exclusive but mutually supportive. This is not, and should not be seen as, an “either-or” proposition. Without solid bilateral relationships, few states would have the confidence to deal with one another in the broader context. Conversely, some problems can best, and perhaps only, be solved bilaterally. It was with this one caveat firmly in mind and clearly articulated that the United States became engaged in multilateral security dialogue in earnest with the advent of the ARF.

ASEAN Regional Forum

The chairman’s statement issued at the end of the inaugural ARF meeting in Bangkok in July 1994 underscored the participant nations’ commitment “to foster the habit of constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of common interest and concern” in order to make “significant efforts toward confidence-building and security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.”² It was further agreed to make the ARF an annual event. Of particular note was the ARF’s willingness to look beyond the immediate ASEAN neighborhood and address broader regional concerns. The second ARF meeting, held in Brunei in August 1995, was a full-day session aimed both at defining organizational principles concerning the ARF (including goals and expectations) and at determining how best (and how fast) to implement proposals and ideas.³ It was also agreed that the ARF would “move at a pace comfortable to all participants.” This was further defined in the 1995 ARF Concept Paper as being an “evolutionary” approach, beginning with a focus on the promotion of confidence-building measures. With time, ASEAN members saw the forum becoming more proactive, with preventive diplomacy as a mid-term objective. Conflict resolution or the “elaboration of approaches to conflict” was identified in the concept paper as the ARF’s eventual goal. The potential importance of track-two activities was also fully recognized, and cooperation between official and nongovernmental efforts was encouraged.

ARF meetings since that time have been widely publicized full-day affairs. They have included reports from the various Intersessional Support Groups (ISGs) and ARF-sponsored track-two meetings, all with the aim of promoting greater confidence and mutual understanding in the region. ISGs have been created to study multilateral search-and-rescue cooperation (significant in that it brought uniformed military officers into the process in a meaningful way) and to examine the development of regional confidence-building measures (CBMs), to include maritime CBMs. ARF-sponsored non-official (track two) meetings have looked at non-proliferation, preventive diplomacy, and the establishment of regional principles of cooperation. ARF's potential future role as a preventive diplomacy mechanism has also been examined and, at least in principle, endorsed.

ARF Maritime Specialist Officials Meeting. ARF has also begun to focus on maritime security issues as part of its broader confidence-building efforts. In November 1998, a Maritime Specialists Officials (MSO) Meeting was held in conjunction with the ISG/CBM Meeting in Honolulu (co-chaired by the United States and Thailand). The stated purpose of the meeting was "to consider and suggest ways and means for ARF to add value to existing activities in the areas of maritime safety, law and order at sea, and protection and preservation of the marine environment."⁴

As part of the MSO effort, participants prepared matrices outlining their respective participation in maritime activities. In addition, existing areas of maritime cooperation were identified and examined. These efforts were aimed, in part, at avoiding ARF duplication of effort, while contributing to the ARF's effort to serve as an umbrella forum through which countries could be kept informed on regional and international efforts. MSO meeting participants also praised and supported CSCAP's work to promote regional maritime cooperation.⁵

General Observations. The ARF seems particularly well suited to serve as the consolidating and validating instrument behind many security initiatives proposed by governments and NGO gatherings in

recent years, including efforts at the official and nongovernmental levels to develop innovative new measures for dealing with potentially sensitive regional security issues, both in Northeast Asia and in the Asia Pacific region as a whole. Nevertheless, the ARF has its limits, especially when it comes to Northeast Asian security issues. While the ARF has taken a position on the need for increased dialogue between South and North Korea, for instance, only the ROK is a member at present.⁶

There are also few illusions regarding the speed with which the ARF will move. The agreement to "move at a pace comfortable to all participants" was aimed at tempering the desire of more Western-oriented members for immediate results in favor of the "evolutionary" approach favored by the ASEAN states, who see the process as being as important as its eventual substantive products. The time-honored Asian principle of non-interference in one another's internal affairs also places some important topics essentially off limits. All parties appear to agree, for example, that one of the most potentially explosive Northeast Asian security issues — namely, China-Taiwan — is an internal Chinese matter.⁷ The Chinese have also been reluctant to address conflicting claims in the South China Sea at the ARF, insisting instead on talks with ASEAN or with the other claimants on an individual basis.

Meanwhile, the need for consensus ensures that the ARF will move ahead only as fast as its most cautious members desire or permit. The evolution of the ARF from a confidence-building measures "talk shop" to a true preventive diplomacy mechanism (as called for in its concept paper) will thus be a long, difficult one, since several members (China and India, in particular) fear that moving ahead with preventive diplomacy will somehow open the door for ARF interference in the internal affairs of its members.⁸ It also underscores the utility of track-two mechanisms that can tackle the more difficult or more sensitive problems while focusing on mid- to long-range solutions.

Four Party Talks

During their April 1996 summit meeting on Cheju Island in the ROK, then-ROK President Kim Young-Sam and U.S. President Bill

Clinton proposed four-party talks among South and North Korea, the United States, and China. The express purpose of the talks was "to initiate a process aimed at achieving a permanent peace agreement," thus replacing the current armistice with a formal Korean peace treaty, ending the state of war that has existed on the peninsula for almost five decades.

The Four Party Talks proposal was a direct response to Pyongyang's continuing demand for direct bilateral peace talks with the United States. The joint presidential declaration flatly stated that the current armistice should be maintained until it was succeeded by a permanent North-South peace treaty and that "separate negotiations between the United States and North Korea on peace-related issues cannot be considered."

The Four Party Talks proposal put the ball back in North Korea's court by the presidents' refusing to accept its unilateral declaration regarding the armistice and by flatly ruling out any hope of a separate peace agreement with the United States alone. The aim was to use the multilateral process, in the first instance, as a substitute for bilateral United States-DPRK talks that would isolate and alienate South Korea, while at the same time using this four-party process to facilitate eventual bilateral North-South direct dialogue.

After more than a year of tedious negotiations, all four parties finally agreed to enter into formal peace talks. The first meeting, chaired by the United States, took place in December 1997 in Geneva but was more ceremonial than substantive. Working-level preparatory talks for the second meeting were to begin in February 1998, but North Korea opted (for reasons known only to them) to skip this phase. The second official session, this time chaired by China, took place in March 1998. On the positive side, all parties did agree that, once underway, the talks could include discussion about potential North-South confidence-building measures as well as the establishment of a peace treaty. However, as they had in many of the earlier preparatory sessions, the North Koreans once again insisted that the subject of U.S. troop withdrawals also be put on the table. The United States and ROK just as consistently refused to allow this, and the meeting made no substantive progress toward establishing a Korean peace treaty.

After months of hesitation, Pyongyang agreed to resume the Four Party Talks, and the third formal session, chaired by the ROK, took place in October 1998 in Geneva. The North stuck to its demand that U.S. troop withdrawals be discussed and also persisted in its efforts to reach a separate treaty with the United States, excluding the ROK. On the positive side, the North did agree with a South Korean proposal to establish two subcommittees, one to pursue a peace treaty and the other to investigate confidence-building measures. All four parties also adopted a "Memorandum on the Establishment and Operation of the Subcommittees."

The fourth meeting, chaired this time by the DPRK, occurred in late January 1999, also in Geneva. All sides agreed upon procedures for the two working groups, an event seen as "highly significant" by the United States and similarly praised by the PRC. However, one of the DPRK participants, Deputy Foreign Minister Kim Gye-gwan, stated, "I don't think I can find any visible progress out of the current talks," adding that the talks would remain "empty" until DPRK demands regarding the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the ROK were met. Ideas for tension reduction on the Korean peninsula, including the establishment of a humanitarian corridor and a new communications channel, apparently were raised (but not agreed upon); and a senior U.S. official acknowledged that "measurable progress" on replacing the armistice agreement was unlikely anytime soon.⁹ All sides agreed to meet again in mid-April 1999.

While little attempt has been made to date to further identify the types of CBMs that will be addressed, one would hope that maritime CBMs would be high on the list, in order to reduce the prospects of potentially dangerous incidents at sea. The recent series of suspected DPRK seaborne infiltration attempts employing spy submarines and "mother ships" (which launch the mini-subs and other infiltration craft) underscores the need for maritime CBMs, as do periodic incidents involving each side's fishing boats and other commercial or military surface craft.

Obviously, the mere holding of the Four Party Talks does not ensure their success. Difficult negotiations lie ahead, and it is impossible to predict either the outcome of the talks or the terms of any

eventual peace treaty. Events on the periphery of the talks, such as North Korean compliance with the Agreed Framework — including the most recent controversy, over the planned use of suspicious (possibly nuclear-related) facilities being constructed underground near the currently frozen nuclear research reactor — the continuation of missile testing and attempted satellite launches (especially if again involving flight over Japan), and continued North Korean submarine espionage missions, all help sour the environment, as does the increasingly partisan nature of the Korean debate (and of foreign policy in general) in Washington.

In the final analysis, much depends on a North Korean decision to proceed in good faith. In my own discussions with North Korean officials, I notice a most welcome change in tone and attitude since Kim Dae Jung's election. For example, at United Nations-sponsored meetings in Jakarta and Kathmandu in February 1998, and again both at the CSCAP Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBM) Working Group meeting in Washington in May and at the CSCAP North Pacific Working Group meeting in Beijing in November, the North Korean presentations were generally balanced and polite.

However, the positions put forth after Kim Dae Jung's December 1997 election have not varied significantly from earlier DPRK pronouncements; namely, that the Four Party Talks should not discuss inter-Korean affairs but only a United States-DPRK peace treaty and U.S. troop withdrawal from the peninsula. Pyongyang still sees a co-equal confederation which respects both sides' different systems as the near-term "solution" to the problem and discounts the need for ROK formal participation in the peace treaty. In short, North Korea appears no less committed to its old positions. Nonetheless, the mere fact that the talks are proceeding is encouraging.

Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization

KEDO was established by the United States and its security partners to implement the U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework. As a Pacific Forum CSIS study documents, the success of the Agreed Framework thus far is closely linked to KEDO's success in achieving its two primary objectives: arranging for fuel oil deliveries and (by negotiating

the supply agreement and necessary support contracts) arranging for the construction of two nuclear light water reactors (LWRs) to replace the North's more proliferation-prone graphite nuclear research reactors.¹⁰ The August 1997 ground-breaking in North Korea to prepare the construction site of the first LWR was a major milestone that many critics had predicted would never be reached. So too was the canning of the spent fuel from North Korea's original (now shut-down) nuclear reactor, which remains under the watchful eye of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Of equal importance, the establishment of KEDO has provided a creative and meaningful way for the ROK to be directly involved in the Agreed Framework process. From KEDO's inception, the ROK has been a member of its Executive Board and has had a direct role in its decision-making process. ROK officials have been involved in all KEDO meetings with the DPRK. As a result, KEDO has become an important vehicle for direct North-South contact.

As the LWR project progresses, thousands of South Koreans will be traveling to the North, coming into direct contact with the 10,000 or more North Korean workers who will be involved in construction activity (largely under South Korean supervision). While such interaction is kept low-key and may not technically qualify as direct dialogue, it is a most important confidence-building mechanism.

In short, one of the unsung successes of KEDO is that it has transformed the bilateral U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework process into a multilateral dialogue in which the Republic of Korea now plays a leading role. This has also helped restore South Korean confidence in the United States - confidence that was shaken during the negotiating process leading up to the Agreed Framework.

KEDO has also successfully brought Japan into the Agreed Framework process. Japan is one of the three co-founders of KEDO and also sits on its Executive Board. In addition to the most obvious benefit — Japanese financial contributions — this direct participation has helped to ensure a coordinated approach toward North Korea among the United States, South Korea, and Japan. Japan's involvement is particularly important since it does not participate in the Four Party Talks and would otherwise feel cut out of peninsula decisionmaking,

which affects Japan's national security interests.

To fulfill its obligations over the next decade, KEDO will have to raise an estimated US\$5 to \$6 billion. South Korea and Japan are expected to provide the bulk of the money, but the future U.S. contribution is still expected to be in the tens of millions of dollars. Should any of KEDO's three primary partners fail to fully fund its acknowledged share, the prospects for peace and stability on a non-nuclear Korean peninsula will be severely set back. America's failure to live up to its share of the bargain — the Clinton administration seems increasingly unable to come up with the funds necessary to pay for its obligated fuel oil deliveries — will also place strains on both the United States-Japan and United States-ROK alliances.

Last fall's agreement by the U.S. Congress to fund initial fiscal year (1999) KEDO fuel oil shipments was helpful, although it comes with several long strings attached, including an insistence that "progress is being made on the implementation of the North-South dialogue." The House-Senate Conference Report on HR4328 (Omnibus Appropriations Bill) also calls for the appointment of a "North Korea Policy Coordinator" and for progress on the implementation of the Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.¹¹ While the president retains the ability to waive certain restrictions on national security grounds, the legislation limits his flexibility and political room for maneuver and adds to the politicization of decisionmaking regarding Korean security.

Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific

Among the most promising mechanisms at the track-two level is the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific, which links regional security-oriented institutes and, through them, broad-based member committees comprising academicians, security specialists, and former and current foreign ministry and defense officials.¹²

CSCAP member committees have been established in Australia, Canada, China, the European Union, Indonesia, Japan, South and North Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, the United States, and Vietnam.¹³ An Indian institute has joined as an associate member, and several United Nations

organizations enjoy affiliate or observer status. In addition, individual Taiwan scholars and security specialists participate in working-group meetings in their private capacities.

CSCAP continues to focus its efforts on providing direct support to the ARF. Several CSCAP issue-oriented working groups are already focusing on specific topics outlined in the various ARF communiqués.¹⁴ These include international working groups on confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs), comprehensive and cooperative security, transnational crime, and maritime security cooperation, along with a North Pacific Working Group (NPWG) focused on the establishment of frameworks for Northeast Asian security cooperation. One of CSCAP's current strengths is that it is one of the few multilateral organizations which can boast of DPRK membership.

Many of the organizing institutes composing the CSCAP Steering Committee have direct or close links to their respective foreign ministries, and there is heavy representation from the ranks of former foreign ministry and defense officials at the various working-group meetings, along with government representatives (again, in their private capacities). CSCAP has maintained close links with the ARF, the ASEAN members of CSCAP being instrumental in creating the ARF concept paper that guides its efforts.

Maritime Cooperation Working Group. The CSCAP Maritime Cooperation Working Group has put forward a proposed set of Guidelines for Regional Maritime Cooperation — fundamental, non-binding principles for regional maritime cooperation and for ensuring a common understanding and approach to maritime issues in the region. The CSCAP proposed guidelines adopted a comprehensive approach to regional security, covering maritime confidence- and security-building and preventive diplomacy measures identified by the ARF and reflecting the strong support in the region for the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

As outlined in the introductory portion of CSCAP Memorandum Number 4, the Guidelines serve several purposes:

First, they constitute an important regional confidence-building measure, laying down general principles for regional maritime cooperation in line with the ARF's long term objective of becoming a mechanism for conflict resolution. They should serve to dampen down tensions, particularly in areas of enclosed or semi-enclosed seas with disputed or overlapping maritime jurisdiction.

Secondly, they serve as a step in the process of building an oceans' governance regime for the Asia Pacific region based on UNCLOS and the inter-related nature of oceans' issues, and devoted to the notion of integrated management of such issues.

Thirdly, the Guidelines should help promote a stable maritime regime in the region with the free and uninterrupted flow of seaborne trade, and nations able to pursue their maritime interests and manage their marine resources in an ecologically sustainable manner in accordance with agreed principles of international law.

Fourthly, the Guidelines apply the concept of comprehensive security in the Asia Pacific region. They should provide a link between the various concepts and processes of comprehensive security and the various forums which are concerned with elements of comprehensive security.

Lastly, the proposed Guidelines encapsulate the progress achieved in the Maritime Cooperation Working Group meetings and pave the way for further work within each of the maritime security issue areas covered by the broad principles for co-operation laid down in the Guidelines.¹⁵

The proposed guidelines are non-binding in nature. They set down broad principles of cooperative behavior in the maritime sector and do not create legally binding obligations between states. Topics covered include maritime cooperation, sea lines of communication,

humanitarian assistance, maritime search and rescue (SAR), maritime safety, law and order at sea, naval cooperation, maritime surveillance, protection and preservation of the marine environment, marine living resources, marine scientific research, technical cooperation and capacity-building, and training and education.

The previously referenced draft report from the November 1998 ARF MSO Meeting "took note of the good work done by CSCAP" and encouraged the CSCAP Working Group to "continue its useful work, and to share its ideas with the ARF as well as with other international fora." In addition, the next meeting of the ARF's ISG on Confidence Building Measures, held in Bangkok in March 1999, was set to address CSCAP's proposed maritime guidelines and study their applicability as an ARF-sponsored maritime confidence-building measure.

CSCAP North Pacific Working Group. While all CSCAP Working Groups touch on Northeast Asian security as part of their broader deliberations, the North Pacific Working Group has Northeast Asia as its sole or primary focus. The NPWG's first meeting was held in Tokyo in April 1995. While the meeting was successful in setting an agenda for future study, it suffered from the lack of PRC and DPRK participation. The China Centre for International Studies (then a candidate CSCAP member) preferred to wait until China had officially become a full member of CSCAP before participating.

While the DPRK's Institute of Disarmament and Peace had earlier joined CSCAP, it also chose not to participate in its first meeting. No formal reason was given, but informally DPRK officials expressed discomfort with attending multilateral meetings in which the Korean peninsula was the sole or primary focus of attention or study.¹⁶

The second meeting, in January of 1997 in Vancouver, focused more broadly on generalized frameworks for Northeast Asian security and was attended by representatives from all the Northeast Asian states (including the PRC and DPRK). At its third meeting, in Tokyo in December 1997, the NPWG examined Northeast Asian economic cooperation, emerging institutions, and confidence-building efforts, while also exploring the ARF's potential role in Northeast Asian security affairs. A North Korean representative gave a presentation on

regional confidence building that focused on peninsular security issues.

A fourth meeting was held in Beijing in November 1998, where discussions focused on the security implications of the Asian financial crisis and on bilateral and multilateral developments and approaches. Once again, CSCAP-North Korea sent two representatives, who were fully engaged in the discussions. While the atmosphere remains cordial, North Korean positions continue essentially unchanged and unyielding.

Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue

There have been many proposals in recent years for the creation of a six-party or "four plus two" dialogue mechanism among the United States, China, Japan, Russia, and the two Koreas.¹⁷ To date, none has been established at the formal, governmental level, despite the personal efforts of several regional leaders. Specifically, then-ROK Foreign Minister Han Sung-joo proposed the creation of a Northeast Asia Security Forum at the second ARF meeting, and most recently ROK President Kim Dae-Jung has been proposing a Northeast Asia Regional Security Forum. Japan has made similar proposals for six-party talks, as has Russia, which is eager not to be left out of the Northeast Asian security process. The United States has been generally (but not enthusiastically) supportive of these initiatives, the Chinese much less so. China claims that it is "premature" to hold official six-party talks and cites North Korean reluctance as a reason. One also suspects that China is less than eager to involve Japan more intimately in regional security affairs. For its part, North Korea has to date rejected all six-party proposals (governmental and nongovernmental) out of hand.

The most prominent and partially successful attempt to establish a four-plus-two mechanism at the track-two level has been the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD), sponsored by the University of California's Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation. Its purpose is to enhance mutual understanding, confidence, and cooperation through meaningful dialogue in an unofficial setting.¹⁸ The NEACD has enjoyed strong U.S. government backing since its inception. At his confirmation hearings to become President Clinton's first assistant secretary of state for East Asia, Winston Lord had laid

out a U.S. commitment to multilateral dialogue.¹⁹ The NEACD was a direct manifestation of the U.S. commitment to this approach.

The NEACD was established to bring together two government officials (normally one each from the foreign and defense ministries) and two private individuals (normally noted academicians or security policy specialists) each from the United States, China, Russia, Japan, and the two Koreas for dialogue on political, security, and economic issues of concern to all parties. The NEACD has now met eight times since October 1993, most recently in Moscow in November 1998. While DPRK representatives attended a preparatory meeting in July 1993, North Korea has not participated in any of the formal meetings held so far.

DPRK spokesmen acknowledge Pyongyang's commitment, at least in principle, to multilateral security dialogue, with one important caveat - namely, that the dialogue not be directed specifically toward (i.e., against) them. North Korea's resistance to four-plus-two settings also stems from their resentment, if not feelings of betrayal, over the lack of progress in establishing diplomatic relations with both Japan and the United States. After both Koreas joined the United Nations, and Beijing and Moscow established diplomatic relations with Seoul, there was an expectation in Pyongyang that Washington and Tokyo would soon follow suit and recognize the DPRK. Ironically, it was North Korean actions — specifically their threat to pull out of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and their refusal to permit International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections — that delayed the desired outcome.

Nonetheless, DPRK spokesmen continue to make it clear that North Korea has no intention of participating in four-plus-two dialogues until "all bilateral relationships are in balance," i.e., until the United States and Japan recognize the DPRK.²⁰ Instead, DPRK officials maintain that "in order to ensure security in the region through multilateral negotiations, it is important to create an atmosphere of confidence building above all by resolving the complicated issues bilaterally."²¹

NEACD continues to serve as an extremely useful dialogue mechanism despite the lack of North Korean participation. In fact, one

could argue that North Korea's absence probably contributes to the frankness and openness of debate among the remaining five members.

NEACD members initially set up two study projects providing for one participant from each member country to examine more closely mutual reassurance measures (MRMs) and principles governing state-to-state relations. The MRM study project laid out some general guidelines and identified specific topics for further study, including defense information sharing (the subject of several NEACD-sponsored working group meetings) and energy-related cooperation. At the December 1997 Tokyo NEACD meeting, the group also approved a set of general principles for consideration by their respective governments. The Asian financial crisis and its security implications were among the topics of discussion at the eighth NEACD, in Moscow in November 1998.

The NEACD is sometimes referred to as "track one and a half" because of heavy representation of government officials and academicians from government-sponsored institutes. While this can inhibit debate by locking participants more tightly into government positions than they might be at other track-two forums, it is also one of the NEACD's real strengths, since it comes close to serving as the Northeast Asian governmental forum that most nations want but have been thus far unable to achieve.

Should North Korea elect finally to join, or if the other five governments decided to proceed with some type of formal official Regional Security Forum without North Korea (while keeping the door open for Pyongyang's eventual participation), the NEACD would provide the ready-made blueprint. At that point, the decision would have to be made whether to let NEACD evolve into a governmental forum, by excluding the current nongovernmental participants, or to have NEACD and the new organization coexist. In the latter case, NEACD would take on the track-two support role for the new Regional Security Forum, similar to CSCAP's role in support of the ARF.

Other Northeast Asian Initiatives

Several subregional efforts focused on Northeast Asia also show promise, and others may prove useful in overcoming lingering regional

apprehensions about the future intentions of many of the region's central actors. Both official and NGO forums seem useful, with the latter better suited to dealing initially with politically sensitive issues. In some instances, the track-two efforts are aimed at facilitating eventual official dialogue.

For example, in August 1994 the Pacific Forum CSIS and the Gaston Sigur Center for East Asian Studies at George Washington University sponsored what was believed to be the first ever organized (while still unofficial) meeting among defense (including uniformed military) officials from Japan, Korea, and the United States, providing a politically acceptable forum for the three sides to discuss common security concerns while bringing America's two closest allies in Northeast Asia closer to one another. Such talks have now become formalized, as has direct military-to-military dialogue between Seoul and Tokyo. The nongovernmental participants, having served their purpose in bringing the three sides together, have now bowed out.

Many other Northeast Asian multilateral initiatives focus on the different sets of three-way regional relationships, most prominently examining United States-China-Japan, United States-Russia-Japan, and United States-Japan-Korea relations. The United States and Japan have expressed interest in formalizing three-way dialogue with China, but Beijing appears more comfortable keeping such efforts at the track-two level at present.

A somewhat more contentious track-two initiative is the Asia-Pacific Security Forum, which was established in 1997. Sponsored by Taiwan's Institute for National Policy Research, its agenda includes PRC-Taiwan cross-straits relations — a subject that is specifically not on the agenda for any dialogue in which mainland China security specialists formally participate.²² As a general rule, Chinese officials are prohibited and Chinese security specialists are strongly discouraged from participating even in general security discussions if Taiwan officials or scholars are present, or if cross-straits relations or other Chinese "sovereignty issues" are being discussed.²³ Many (the author included) would argue that this self-exclusionary policy works against China's long-term interests and adds to the general mistrust and lack of understanding between Beijing and Taipei.

The United Nations has also gotten into the track-two act. For the past ten years, the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific has sponsored "unofficial" meetings in which regional scholars and government officials gather in Kathmandu, Nepal, and other locations to discuss various regional and global disarmament issues in what has become known as the "Kathmandu process." All Northeast Asian nations regularly participate, including both North and South Korea. Despite the non-official status of the Kathmandu process, since it is UN-affiliated and Taiwan has been specifically excluded from UN events due to strong PRC objections, Taiwan has not been invited to these meetings.

Other major track-two initiatives include a series of Indonesia-hosted Workshops on the South China Sea that focus on technical issues among the various Spratly Island claimants and a Philippines-hosted series examining the security implications of conflict over these islands. Both gatherings are aimed at promoting greater understanding and cooperation in order to reduce the prospects of conflict in this potentially volatile area.

Benefits of Multilateral Cooperation

Emerging multilateral security mechanisms in Asia can be important vehicles for promoting long-term peace and stability. Institutionalized multilateral forums can be most valuable if they serve as confidence-building measures aimed at avoiding, rather than reacting to, crises or aggression. In time, they should also be capable of dealing with less politically sensitive non-traditional security concerns such as disaster relief, coordination of refugee problems, and coping with pollution and other environmental issues. In this regard, the decision by the ARF to establish a working group to discuss multinational cooperation in the area of search and rescue seems particularly noteworthy. It also provides a vehicle for uniformed military participation in this track-one effort in a positive, non-threatening context.

Multilateral settings can also facilitate bilateral (or subregional) dialogue among nations and their official or unofficial representatives, who for a variety of reasons may be unable or ill prepared to make arrangements directly with one another. The annual Asia-Pacific

Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Meetings, for example, made it possible for President Clinton to engage in direct discussions with Chinese President Jiang Zemin during Clinton's first term in office, when bilateral summit meetings would have been politically impossible to otherwise arrange. These meetings helped set the stage for the successful 1997/98 Clinton-Jiang summits in Washington and Beijing.

Multilateral security mechanisms are, by their mere existence, confidence-building measures, in that they promote greater trust and understanding in the region. They also provide a forum for the further investigation and development of confidence-building measures that may be applied either region-wide or on a more selective, subregional basis. In this, as in many other instances of multilateral dialogue, the process itself is an extremely important product, since increased dialogue promotes increased understanding, which in turn hopefully leads to a reduced risk of conflict.

Multilateral forums also provide a venue for other regional actors to be heard on security issues that affect them all. Track-two organizations such as CSCAP and NEACD can provide "benign cover" for governments to vet new policies and strategies in a more academic setting before adopting formal proposals at the official level. Nongovernmental organizations can also provide a voice to nations, territories, and regional groupings that, for a variety of reasons, might be excluded from official gatherings. Especially important in this regard in CSCAP's case is the ability to provide the Chinese people on Taiwan with a voice in regional security affairs, given Beijing's refusal to permit Taiwanese representation in official forums.

In addition, nations or entities that might find it uncomfortable or politically unacceptable to engage in bilateral dialogue can still effectively interact at the multinational level, particularly in NGO forums. As noted earlier, forums such as CSCAP can provide a useful means for Koreans on both sides of the DMZ to engage one another in broader security discussions that otherwise may be difficult to arrange. Asian multinational gatherings also contribute to a sense of regional identity and cooperation that can spill over into the political and economic spheres, just as growing political and economic cooperation has helped set the stage for expanded security dialogue.

Multilateral security forums provide a framework for enhanced U.S. involvement in Asian security that complements America's current bilateral security commitments. Such meetings permit Japan to become more actively involved in regional security matters in a manner that is not threatening to neighboring countries. Multilateral gatherings also provide a useful vehicle for greater interaction between China and its neighbors while promoting greater transparency regarding Chinese capabilities and intentions.

Multilateralism also gives Russia opportunities for greater regional integration while bolstering those in the Kremlin most committed to international cooperation. Finally, nongovernmental forums provide a venue for bringing North Korean officials into direct contact with their southern counterparts in a less-confrontational atmosphere, while also helping expose them to broader regional realities.

Caveats

A clear understanding of the weaknesses and boundaries of Asian multilateral security organizations — what they are neither suited for nor intended to undertake — is also needed, in order to prevent false or overoptimistic expectations and to allow the nations of the region to maximize the opportunities and benefits to be derived from multilateral approaches to regional security.

Broad-based institutionalized multilateral forums like the ARF are useful vehicles for discussing potential problems but seem ill-equipped (and not very eager) when it comes to resolving crises once they have occurred. This is especially true if the use of force is contemplated or proves necessary. The ARF is not today and has no aspirations of becoming a military alliance.

In the event of military hostilities or a clear threat to its national security interests in Asia, the United States is more likely to act in concert with its existing allies or through an ad hoc grouping of like-minded states, similar to the Desert Storm coalition assembled to deal with Iraqi aggression during 1990/91. A standing NATO-type alliance aimed at defeating or containing a specified threat simply does not fit in a post-cold war Asia — nor, for that matter, was it possible to sustain

even at the height of the cold war.

As regards the Korean peninsula, multilateral dialogue is useful in order to create a more cooperative environment and to build a level of familiarity and comfort, if not trust and confidence, between the two sides. There are limits, however, to how far the multilateral process can take things, given the strong belief (both in Seoul and in Pyongyang) that, ultimately, a Korean solution must be found to this Korean problem. In the final analysis, direct dialogue between South and North still appears essential to reduce tensions, to build confidence, and eventually to help bring about the peaceful reunification of the peninsula.

As noted earlier in describing the ARF, multilateral organizations (governmental and nongovernmental) generally act through consensus in setting their agendas and making recommendations. This acts as a brake of sorts on how fast these organizations can move forward. For this reason, those promoting multilateral dialogue and various forms of regional confidence building realize the continued value and relevance of unilateral and bilateral measures that not only build trust and confidence in their own right but also help lay the foundation for broader-based cooperation. Such efforts set useful precedents and place pressures on multilateral organizations to move forward.

Conclusion

Emerging Asia-Pacific multilateral security mechanisms hold great potential for enhancing regional security. Efforts that build upon and seek to complement, but not to replace, bilateral security relationships that already exist in Asia are of particular value from a U.S. perspective.

While multilateral security initiatives hold many promises for Asia, it is important to understand their limits, as well as the opportunities they present. A NATO-type alliance aimed at containing a specified threat simply does not suit post-cold war Asia. Rather, emerging mechanisms should be viewed more as confidence-building measures aimed at avoiding or dampening the possibilities of, rather than reacting to, crises or aggression.

As far as the Korean peninsula is concerned, significant progress is expected to be slow and contingent upon eventual active, constructive participation by the DPRK. While formal arrangements such as the ROK-proposed Northeast Asian Regional Security Forum appear unlikely in the near term — for that matter, it is difficult to envision an Association of Northeast Asian States, even with an economic or political focus — track-two approaches like the NEACD and CSCAP hold some promise. Meaningful progress, especially at the official level, will require a resumption of South-North dialogue. Subsequent recognition of the DPRK by both Japan and the United States as part of the process leading to the establishment of a permanent peace regime on the peninsula also appears to be an important interim step toward eventual reunification.

Notes

1. Officially titled *The United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region*.
2. See the chairman's statement issued at the end of the first ASEAN Regional Forum meeting in Bangkok, 25 July 1994. For the complete text and a review of the proceedings by the Thai Foreign Ministry's ARF coordinator, see Sarasin Viraphol, "ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)," in Pacific Forum CSIS's weekly *PacNet Newsletter* 33 (October 14, 1994).
3. See "Chairman's Statement of the Second ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), 1 August 1995, Bandar Seri Begawan," *PacNet* 29 (August 18, 1995). For an analysis of the meeting, see also Jusuf Wanandi, "Dialogue on Security Gains Momentum," *PacNet* 31 (September 1, 1995).
4. From the draft "Report of the Co-Chairmen of the 1998/1999 Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum on Confidence Building Measures Maritime Specialist Officials Meeting."
5. CSCAP's efforts, largely through its Maritime Security Working group, are spelled out later in this paper.
6. The DPRK had earlier expressed a desire to be included, but until recently the ROK (and the United States) did not appear eager to see Pyongyang represented. Now that the DPRK is participating in the Four Party Talks, the prospects for DPRK admission into the ARF have improved — although it remains unclear if the ROK will actively support DPRK membership or if North Korea will in fact formally apply to join.
7. Beijing also insists that Southeast Asia's most contentious hotspot involving conflicting territorial claims in the South China Sea is also an "internal" matter between China and the various claimants, and not an appropriate topic for broader multilateral discussion.

8. This despite the fact that all working definitions of the process used in Asia stress that preventive diplomacy requires the *voluntary* participation of all involved parties.
9. For more details, see Geir Moulson, "U.S., China, Koreans Wrap Up Talks," Associated Press, January 22, 1999, as cited in *Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network Daily Report*, January 25, 1999.
10. *Monitoring the Agreed Framework: A Third Anniversary "Report Card,"* Pacific Forum CSIS special report (Honolulu: Pacific Forum CSIS, 1997).
11. Former Secretary of Defense William Perry has been designated as the North Korea Policy Coordinator. His review of U.S. policy toward the DPRK was scheduled to be completed by the end of March 1999.
12. As noted earlier, government (including uniformed military) participants take part in their private capacities, and not as official spokespersons for their governments' views. While force of habit (and fear of leaks) may compel them to stay close to the party line, the dialogue is still considerably more candid than in official settings, especially over time. The active participation by foreign military and defense (including uniformed military) officials helps ensure a more informed debate while allowing new ideas to be explored without their being interpreted as government policy.
13. Of particular note was the December 1994 entry of North Korea, through its Institute of Disarmament and Peace in Pyongyang, after the ROK member committee signaled its strong support for the DPRK's admission.
14. Issued at the close of each ARF annual meeting, in the form a chairman's statement.
15. "CSCAP Memorandum No. 4: Guidelines for Regional Maritime Cooperation," published by the CSCAP Secretariat on behalf of the CSCAP Maritime Cooperation Working Group and available through the CSCAP-Australia (Working Group co-chair) Web site, <http://coombs.anu.edu.au/Depts/RSPAS/AUSCSCAP/memo4.html>.
16. The focus of the first NPWG was the development of a framework for stability on the Korean peninsula.
17. A few proposals also include Mongolia and, less frequently, Canada in the grouping.
18. For background information, please see Susan Shirk and Christopher Twomey, "Beginning Security Cooperation in Northeast Asia: A Report on the First Meeting of the Institute of Global Conflict and Cooperation's Northeast Asian Cooperation Dialogue," *PacNet* 33 (November 5, 1993).
19. For more information, see "Excerpts from Ambassador Winston Lord's Confirmation Hearings," *PacNet* 13 (April 7, 1993).
20. Based on my own discussions with DPRK diplomats at CSCAP meetings and at the UN Regional Centre's annual conference in Kathmandu, Nepal, and elsewhere.
21. As stated by So Chang-Sik, chief of the DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Disarmament Division, in a summary statement entitled "Features of Security Situation in the Asia-Pacific Region, Northeast Region, and the Korean Peninsula," distributed at the annual UN Regional Centre's conference in Kathmandu, Nepal, February 21-24, 1996, p. 3.
22. The Pacific Forum CSIS is a co-host. The APSF held its second annual meeting in

Manila in December 1998.

23. As noted earlier, CSCAP is one of the few forums in which China's and Taiwan's security specialists interact. Even here, Taiwan's involvement is restricted to working group activities, and "internal Chinese matters" are not discussed.