

# **Six Party Talks and Prospects of Northeast Asian Multilateral Security Regime**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the likelihood of founding a Northeast Asian multilateral security regime (NAMSR) based on the successful conclusion of the six party talks on the Korean nuclear issues. Firstly, it starts with a brief review on the process and achievements of the Six Party Talks so far, while emphasizing the concerns of all parties on a nuclear free Korean Peninsula, and the necessity of nuclear energy cooperation in the sub-region thereof. Secondly, it continues with a discussion on the essential needs of establishing the NAMSR for East Asian regionalization at large. East Asian regionalization is understood here as having made progresses, but with critical limits, in the sense that the mobilizing factors for promoting such are mainly economic, and not so much of security. Drawing from the European (though many would argue the inappropriateness of it to the Asian case) and ASEAN experience, regional integration based common security concerns is of more solid foundation than mere economic. In conclusion, it is argued that, on the one hand, the NAMSR would meet the needs of two Koreas (for the stability of the Peninsula and the prospect of national reunification), China (enhancing China's regional influences), and even the US (while being excluded from such processes as ASEAN+3 and East Asian Summit, the NAMSR can be a crucial multilateral cooperation scheme in which the US involved). On the other hand, the NAMSR could also supplement both the US centered East Asian alliance structure, and the evolving East Asian regionalization centered on

ASEAN+3 and the building of East Asian community.

Key words: Six Party Talks    NAMSUR    Multilateral Security Regime

## **Introduction**

On September 19th, a joint statement was adopted at the fourth round of Six-Party Talks, talks which were designed to deal with the North Korean nuclear issue. In some small way, the six parties seem to have moved somewhat closer to a solution. This step forward is nonetheless a victory, one that is owing to the parties' commitment to dialogue and negotiation. This is significant, for in this way the six parties have converted a security challenge into an opportunity in which to cooperatively build peace and a security framework in Northeast Asia.

This paper examines the likelihood of founding a Northeast Asian multilateral security regime (NAMSUR) based on the successful conclusion of the six party talks on the Korean nuclear issues. Firstly, it starts with a brief review on the process and achievements of the Six Party Talks so far, while emphasizing the concerns of all parties on a nuclear free Korean Peninsula, and the necessity of nuclear energy cooperation in the sub-region thereof. Secondly, it continues with a discussion on the essential needs of establishing the NAMSUR for East Asian regionalization at large. East Asian regionalization is understood here as having made progresses, but with critical limits, in the sense that the mobilizing factors for promoting such are mainly economic, and not so much of security. Drawing from the European (though many would argue the inappropriateness of it to the Asian case) and ASEAN experience, regional integration based common security concerns is of more solid foundation than mere economic. In conclusion, it is argued that, on the one hand, the NAMSUR would meet the needs of two Koreas (for the stability of the Peninsula and the prospect of national reunification), China (enhancing China's regional influences), and even the US (while being excluded from such processes as ASEAN+3 and East Asian Summit, the NAMSUR can be a crucial multilateral cooperation scheme in which the US involved). On the other hand, the NAMSUR could also supplement both the US centered East Asian alliance structure, and

the evolving East Asian regionalization centered on ASEAN+3 and the building of East Asian community.

## **Six Party Talks: Origin, Process and Achievements**

### *Origin of the current Six-Party Talks*

The current Six-Party Talks has as its origin a negative rationale. That is, in response to North Korea's demand to resolve the emerging highly enriched uranium (HEU) crisis bilaterally with the United States, the United States opted to broaden the field of players while refusing to deal directly with Pyongyang. Objectively that was the right decision, but it was based more on a desire not to be seen as repeating the "failure" of the Clinton's Administration's Agreed Framework.

During US Secretary of State Colin Powell's stop in China enroute to the inauguration of ROK President Roh Moo Hyun in February 2003, he suggested that Beijing would be well positioned to organize and host multilateral talks involving the United States, China, Japan, and North and South Korea. The Chinese did not respond directly to the Secretary, but did pursue the suggestion in early March when former Foreign Minister and Vice Premier Qian Qichen went to Pyongyang. When the North Koreans rejected the Chinese offer of five-party talks, Qian revised his suggestion on the spot and offered three-party talks instead. However, Pyongyang continued to request bilateral talks between the US and the DPRK

Concurrently, Beijing was assuring Washington that the talks truly would be trilateral in every sense of the word and not simply an excuse for the DPRK and the United States to meet bilaterally. Given the fact that Pyongyang and Washington were exchanging information through the New York channel, Beijing needed to take control of any conversation dealing with the trilateral talks to preserve their benign deception. Beijing requested of Washington that it be the official and only channel of communications with Pyongyang regarding the trilateral talks.

When Pyongyang sent comments or questions through its UN Mission in New York, Washington replied through Beijing. This arrangement of communications concerning

trilateral talks served Beijing's purposes well. It brought the DPRK and United States together in Beijing in April 2003 for an initial round of talks aimed at resolving the emerging second nuclear crisis. What Beijing did not bargain on was that the United States would continue to use Beijing as a substitute for talking directly with Pyongyang on issues not directly related to the mechanism or logistics of multilateral talks. The process that led to trilateral talks soon became an impediment to meaningful diplomacy.

In the end, what Beijing had hoped for did not occur. When the three parties met in late April 2003 in Beijing, the DPRK head of delegation asked to meet bilaterally with the United States delegation, as Pyongyang had been led to believe would occur. The United States delegation, on strict instructions, refused to meet the North Koreans. Based on that refusal, the North Koreans ended their participation and returned to Pyongyang after a hastily arranged closing trilateral meeting.

### *The Six-Party Talks*

Almost immediately after the failure of the April session, the Chinese sought to resurrect the process, seeking to repeat the three-party formula. By this time, the United States was insisting that any future rounds include the ROK and Japan. Washington had previously received approval from Seoul and Tokyo for the first trilateral session that excluded them, but with the understanding that talks would be expanded to include the ROK and Japan as soon as possible. Upon Moscow's insistence, the United States quickly added Russia to the list of future participants in any multilateral talks. In consultations with Secretary Powell in late July 2003, Chinese Vice Minister Dai Bingguo pushed for Washington's acceptance of another round of three-party talks in view of Pyongyang's insistence that it would not attend five- or six-party talks. In a compromise and in consideration of Beijing's efforts, the United States suggested that it could attend an initial three-party session if it were followed immediately by a full six-party round of talks.

By this time, Secretary Powell had gained the President's approval for the American delegation to have direct contact with North Korea in the context of a multilateral setting. On 1 August, the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) responded publicly to the various formulas that had been proposed to restart talks in Beijing.

During the late August 2003 first round of Six-Party Talks, the US and DPRK delegations did meet for approximately thirty minutes in a corner of the room used for plenary talks. However, the plenary talks did not go well and, unable to reach agreement on a joint statement, Chinese Vice Minister Wang Yi was forced to issue a chairman's statement.

“The major result coming out of the talks is that all parties share a consensus with the following main points: All parties are willing to work for peaceful settlement of the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula through dialog, and to safeguard peace and stability and bring about lasting peace on the Peninsula; all parties maintain that while a nuclear-free Peninsula should be realized, the DPRK's security concerns and other areas should be considered and solved; all parties agree, in principle, to explore and decide on an overall plan for solving the nuclear issue in stages and through synchronous or parallel implementation in a just and reasonable manner; all parties agree that in the process of peace talks, any action and word that may escalate or intensify the situation should be avoided; all parties agree that dialog should continue to establish trust, reduce differences, and broaden common ground; all parties agree that the six-party talks should continue, and the date and venue for the next round of talks should be decided through diplomatic channels as soon as possible.”<sup>1</sup>

A couple of days later Wang was asked by reporters in Manila what he thought the biggest obstacle to achieving a next round of Beijing talks was. He said, “The American policy towards DPRK—this is the main problem we are facing.”<sup>2</sup> After failing to get consensus for a joint statement at the conclusion of the August talks, Beijing wanted to ensure success in advance of the next round. The process came to an abrupt halt on 12 December when Vice President Cheney is said to have intervened to insist specific language be inserted in the text of the draft joint statement. He is purported to have said, “I have been charged by the president with making sure that none of the tyrannies in the world are negotiated with. We don't negotiate with evil; we defeat it,” effectively killing any chance that a statement could be agreed upon.<sup>11</sup> It took another two months before Pyongyang agreed to participate in the 25–28 February 2004 talks.

The first two days of the February round of talks appeared to take on a more positive

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<sup>1</sup> *People's Daily*, 29 August 2003

<sup>2</sup> *Manila Chinese Commercial News*, 2 September, 2003

tone, but on the third day talks again began to break down over the specifics of a new Chinese proposal for a joint statement. The plenary session on day three broke up after an hour and a half, with the remainder of Friday and Saturday devoted to trying to salvage a statement that could highlight the success of the talks. In the end, there was no agreement on a joint statement and Beijing had to, once again, issue a Chairman's Statement, which included the following elements: The Parties agreed that the second round of the six-party talks had launched the discussion on substantive issues, which was beneficial and positive, and that the attitudes of all parties were serious in the discussion; While differences remained, the Parties enhanced their understanding of each other's position through the talks; The Parties expressed their commitment to a nuclear-weapon-free Korean Peninsula, and to resolving the nuclear issue peacefully through dialogue in a spirit of mutual respect and consultation on an equal basis, so as to maintain peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and the region at large; The Parties expressed their willingness to coexist peacefully. They agreed to take coordinated steps to address the nuclear issue and the related concerns; The Parties agreed to continue the process of the talks and agreed in principle to hold the third round of the six-party talks in Beijing no later than the end of the second quarter of 2004. They agreed to set up a working group in preparation for the plenary session. The terms of reference of the working group will be established through diplomatic channels.<sup>3</sup>

In an article in the 4 March 2004 edition of the *Washington Post*, President Bush is cited as having "instructed the US delegation to say the administration's continued support of the six-party process rested on North Korea's commitment to completely, verifiably and irreversibly dismantle its program." The article went on to highlight the implication that all options were still on the table—a not so subtle threat that military action was possible if Pyongyang did not admit to its HEU program and commit to dismantling both its plutonium and HEU nuclear weapons programs.

In an apparent effort to keep the prospects alive, Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi, head of the Chinese delegation, said all parties should make concerted efforts in three areas: First, they should carefully study key standpoints of substantial issues and solutions proposed during the talks, from which they could summarize positive factors. Second, a working

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<sup>3</sup> *Xinhua News Agency*, Beijing, 28 February 2004

group should be formed as soon as possible to prepare for the third round talks. Third, the parties should maintain a peaceful environment for the process of talks and avoid words or actions that might intensify differences or provoke other parties.<sup>4</sup>

The third round of Six-Party Talks in late June 2004 were shaping up as a critical session. The South Koreans were making progress in their own talks with Pyongyang, Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi had made a second trip to Pyongyang and the Chinese had made public comments about the need for additional US flexibility in dealing with North Korea. Had the June round of talks followed the pattern of the previous two sessions many observers believed it could have been the end of the multilateral process. However, concerns within the US administration over continued critical world opinion, the prospect that North Korea could become an election year issue and, most importantly, the personal intervention by Prime Minister Koizumi with President Bush during the G8 meeting in early June 2004 at Sea Island, Georgia, led the United States to make its first concrete proposal to resolve the nuclear crisis during the third round of talks.

While Pyongyang eventually rejected the specifics of the US proposal, it initially declared that positive progress had been made. In testimony before the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly described the US proposal as one in which the United States envisioned a short preparatory period of three months to prepare for the dismantlement and removal of the DPRK's nuclear programs. In this initial period, according to Kelly, the DPRK would provide a complete listing of all its nuclear activities, and cease operations of all its nuclear activities; permit the securing of all fissile material and the monitoring of all fuel rods; and permit the publicly disclosed and observable disablement of all nuclear weapons/weapon components and key centrifuge parts. Kelly emphasized that North Korea's declaration would need to include its uranium enrichment program and existing weapons. Under this proposal, other parties would take corresponding steps as the DPRK carried out its commitments. One of the provisions of the US proposal that Pyongyang found troubling (among many) was the exclusion of the United States from taking part in the provision of heavy fuel oil to North Korea once Pyongyang had agreed to the approach outlined by Kelly.

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<sup>4</sup> *Xinhua News Agency*, Beijing, 5 March 2004

For its part, Pyongyang, through its spokesman, said, “clearly expressing once again that the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula is our ultimate goal, we once again made it clear that if the United States gives up its hostile policy against us through action, we will transparently renounce all our nuclear weapons-related programs. We presented a concrete plan on nuclear freeze, on the premise that if [sic] the United States withdraws the CVID [Complete, Verifiable, Irreversible Dismantlement] demand and accepts our demand for reward.”<sup>5</sup> The third round ended with both the United States and the DPRK having made proposals, but without a serious discussion of either.

The agreed joint statement of the Fourth Round of the Six Party Talks includes six points that outline a way to move forward to ensure the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Further, it may form the basis to move on to specific fulfillment. But the outcome of the fourth round of talks should not be simply limited to a peaceful resolution for the North Korean nuclear issue. In this statement following key points are included:

- 1) denuclearization of the Korean peninsula;
- 2) normalization of relations between North Korea and the United States
- 3) normalization of relations between North Korea and Japan;
- 4) economic cooperation in the fields of energy, trade and investment, as well as multilateral energy assistance for the DPRK; and
- 5) a permanent peace regime on the Korean peninsula.

Especially, the provision regarding the normalization of U.S.-DPRK and DPRK-Japanese relations would be milestones. Though the United States has regarded the North as one of the “axis of evil,” significant progress was made for peace in Northeast Asia as both nations agreed to “respect each other’s sovereignty and exist peacefully together.” (For the U.S., this is premised on the North’s abandonment of its nuclear pursuits.) Japan’s promise to normalize relations with North Korea in accordance with the Pyongyang Declaration of September 2002 is equally significant as it came about through a multilateral framework.

In these developments there is potential for Northeast Asian regional order to reach new heights. Fulfilling what has been outlined in the joint statement now becomes crucial. Under the expressed principle of “commitment for commitment, action-to-action,” one of

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<sup>5</sup> DPRK Spokesman’s 25 June press conference at SixParty Talks in Beijing, [www.xignite.com](http://www.xignite.com)

the core issues will be the energy security that would be provided to the North premised on its abandonment of its nuclear programs. Apart from South Korea's pledge of electricity to the North, all five nations— China, Japan, South Korea, Russia, and the United States— agreed to provide energy assistance. Hence, the provision of energy aid will no doubt continue to take on a multilateral dimension. Energy assistance to the North thus may be an appropriate starting point for realizing multilateral energy cooperation in the Northeast Asian region.

But the greatest significance of this agreement is the characteristic of the multilateral security guarantee in a comprehensive way toward the North. The principles suggested are not limited to a technical dimension—such as “abandon this,” “supply that”— but take on a much greater political dimension that involve “normalization of relations” and a “peace regime.” This suggests that the agreement has its strong characteristic as a political agreement among related nations in regard to the peace of Northeast Asia as well as the Korean Peninsula. In this respect, I believe that the success of the Six-Party Talks would provide a crucial opportunity for an NAMSR in the future. It is necessary for us to escape from passive attitudes, which would limit the process of the Six-Party Talks in the nuclear resolution of the North. There is an equal demand to change the security order of Northeast Asia (NEA)—which has suffered from historical confrontation, competition, and remnants of the Cold-War structure— into one of peace and co-prosperity based on reconciliation and cooperation. In doing so, we need to put these efforts to practical use so as to pursue the goal of building an NAMSR.

### **Multilateral Security Cooperation in Northeast and East Asia**

The significance of such a multilateral security regime would lie both for Northeast Asian sub-region and East Asian region.

For Northeast Asian stability and peace, including each respective nation's security, the notion of common security or cooperative security that considers mutual security needs to be a new subject. That is, trust building must be accomplished through dialogue and negotiation, and mutual threat reduction through arms control. The security culture of NEA needs to escape from the Hobbesian idea of the other as “enemy” and embrace the

Kantian ideal of the other as “friend.”

Ultimately, the best way to institutionalize security is by building a multilateral security cooperation regime in the sub-region. Unfortunately, in NEA, the functions and roles of the multilateral security organizations in the region are limited in terms of their scope and area. There are organizations, such as CSCAP (Committee on Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific) and NEACD (Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue), which function at the 1.5-2.0 track level; but their policy effects fall far short of being sufficient. In a broader context, the ASEAN Regional Forum does exist, but it too has been unsatisfactory in regards to security cooperation, and is normally termed as mere “talk shop”.

To have any possibility of maximizing security cooperation, nations must perceive threats as common threats, and stand together against them. In NEA now, the North Korean nuclear issue stands out as one major common security threat to regional stability and peace. The Six-Party Talks has functioned as a realistic and unique dialogue framework to tackle this common threat. For its part, the Chinese government has contributed greatly to the talks— in particular, getting the relevant parties back to the negotiation table.

Given the progress to date, the relevant parties have been able to place their hope on the developmental application of the Six-Party Talks. South Korea has been one of the talk’s biggest supporters. China, Japan, and Russia too are showing more positive attitudes toward the need for multilateral security cooperation in the region. The United States favors the same as it does not want to be excluded from discussion on the region’s security matters. Which way North Korea is leaning, however, is still a mystery. But as long as the NAMSRS keeps the door open for North Korea, no major problem should occur.

It can be argued that the multilateral security cooperation requires a process where by it institutionalizes itself initially as a multilateral security regime, and later evolves into a multilateral security cooperation organization. Here again, I would suggest that the European experience provides direction. Considering Northeast Asian security reality, it is necessary for the agenda of NAMSRS to start in an area where the interests of the relevant nations meet. I believe energy cooperation would be the most significant agenda

to make practical progress. Many will agree that energy security will be— if it isn't already— a vital factor influencing each nation's national security strategy. As oil prices continue to break record highs, the importance of energy will increase in Northeast Asia, where energy consumption is high.

Currently, energy emerges as an area of competition among Northeast Asian countries. Right now, Russia's Siberian oil-pipeline construction, where China and Japan are competing, is a good example of this strategic competition. However, I believe we have to turn our approach to energy around. We need to see this as a means for strategic "cooperation," not "competition." It is with energy that we need to open the door for a "win-win" approach; "zero-sum" logic needs to be shown the exit.

Energy cooperation can be looked at from two angles: supply, and demand. On the supply side, joint exploration and development of energy resources— such as the oil and gas of the Russian Far East— stands out as a representative project. Building a supply network with pipelines should also be considered here. Additionally, other available long-term projects should be considered, such as development of sustainable electricity of the Russian Far East, one that involves a network or exchange to connect Russia, North Korea, and South Korea. On the demand side, nations in the region that exhibit a high demand —that is, Korea, China, and Japan- should cooperate in organizing a Northeast Asian energy cooperation regime. These nations would then benefit from operating cooperative projects such as joint purchasing, joint reserves, and joint development of alternative energy. Such projects would contribute to enhancing the stability of energy supply and demand, provide greater energy security, as well as mitigating regional actors' dependency on oil from the Middle East.

On East Asian level, we can also look closely at the wisdom Europe has provided us. In solving its security dilemma and building an economic community, European nations did not regard each other as potential "enemies" or "threats." Rather they saw each other as cooperative partners, and built relationships based on trust, reconciliation, and genuine introspection of its history. The founding and evolution of the EC/EU reveals such a tendency. In order to get rid of the burden of historical hatred, especially that between France and Germany, European nations began a process of regional integration in the late 1940s.

Distinct from East Asian regional integration process that is based mainly on economic matters, the Europeans built their cooperation ties initially for security reasons. When analyzing the theory of new regionalism, Bjorn Hettne emphasizes that regionalization is a multi-dimensional process in which security matters should be the basis, while economic ones as promoting forces. For East Asian regional integration, having mere economic links is far from sufficient. An NAMSIR based on the successful conclusion of the Six-Party Talks can fill the vacuum of the lacking of the security regime that is based on the common understanding of security threat. And as argued earlier, such a regime can be initially focusing on military (nuclear weapon) and energy security, but not limited to these.

The following security issues would be important in East Asian security cooperation: refugees, proliferation of terrorism, transnational crime, natural disasters, and environmental security. These are issues that East Asia faces, all transnational threats that cannot be solved at the national level. (Last Christmas' tsunami that hit Southeast Asia, and the recent Hurricane Katrina in the USA show that natural disaster can be a serious threat to human security. Transnational environment issues such as industrial pollution, yellow dust, acid rain, and SARS also threaten our health and security to different degrees.) To deal with these issues, multinational cooperation is necessary. But today's cooperation regime is not institutionalized enough to deal with these issues. The multinational security cooperation in East Asia, however, would be an appropriate framework to discuss these issues.

## **Conclusion**

The US military presence is a reality every country in East Asia has to accept. Barry Buzan describes US engagement in the NATO collective defense and US involvement in East Asian military alliance as "superpower overlay". This overlay, in my understanding, is insufficient without simultaneous engagement in regional multilateral security cooperation. The arch realist and practitioner Henry Kissinger reminds us that the formation of stability requires states to reduce both "the opportunities for using force" *and* "the desire to use force". A balance of power based on, in this case US-centered

military alliance, can contribute to the first goal but is inherently incapable of creating the second. Kissinger's insight suggests that regional order is constructed through balancing practices and the desire of states not to use force. In other words, a balance of power system based on military alliance creates negative peace while multilateral security regime constructs positive peace. An NAMSRS based on the successful conclusion of the Six-Party Talks provides an opportunity for reducing "the desire of using force", a more solid basis for regional peace and stability. Therefore, it is in the interest of the US to be engaged in the likely NAMSRS, where it has nothing to lose but a lot to gain.

And also, the NAMSRS would meet the needs of two Koreas (for the stability of the Peninsula and the prospect of national reunification), China (enhancing China's regional influences), Russia (for having a presence in East Asian security cooperation), and Japan, which has been regarding North Korea as one of the primary threats.

More Widely, the NAMSRS could also supplement both the US centered East Asian alliance structure, and the evolving East Asian regionalization centered on ASEAN+3 and the building of East Asian community, which thus far focus mainly on economic matters.