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**“The Nuclear Crisis & Multilateral Security
Approach in Northeast Asian”**

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The Nuclear Crisis & Multilateral Security

Approach in Northeast Asian^{*}**

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Introduction

A new round of tension in the Korean Peninsula has been attracting the eyeballs of the whole world. However, people's focuses are more narrowed on the nuclear issue *per se* while the related problems are ignored, although which may cast profounder impacts upon those living in the Northeast Asia.

Actually, we must see through the nuclear issue, develop a comprehensive understanding and make an adequate estimation of its regional implication and potential consequences. Additionally, we must apply with broader perspectives before we anticipate the tendency of the changes in the international pattern in Northeast Asia and devise strategic plans and principles to cope with such evolutions.

In this sense, quite a number of issues are worthy of our concern and close attention, among which the interaction between the nuclear issue and regional multilateral security dialogue and cooperation is a typical strategic topic.

Between the Two Crises

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It is both interesting and meaningful to follow the nuclear issue all the time and compare the international as well regional environments of the two crises. We find that the different external conditions between a decade ago and the present led to drastically unlike crisis management and regional consequences.

In the last decade, particularly the past three or four years, regional situation became moderate and relations among regional powers all improved, with the only exception of the complex US-DPRK relations. Another change, which is mutually facilitating and interacting as both cause and effect with the improved state-to-state relations, was the growing attempts to establish multilateral security dialogue and cooperation in the region and varied policies and actions towards this direction taken by related countries.

It is worthy of our attention how the bilateral improvement affected the multilateral relations and regional situation. In the cold-war era, there used to be a Southern Triangle and a Northern Triangle in the Northeast Asia. The so-called cross-recognition was only accomplished half. Given such a background, the effect of improvements in either the DPRK-Japan relations or the Sino-ROK relations naturally go beyond the concerned parties to the pattern and order of the whole regional.

In fact, different schemes about multilateral security cooperation have already been put forward from long ago. For instance back to 1998, the then Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi proposed the Six-Party formula during his meetings with the US and ROK counterparts and his plan was echoed by President KIM Dae-jung immediately. International academic circles increased debates over the issue of multilateral security dialogue since 2000 and related governments also embarked on studying all designs.

We can infer from the above analysis that energy propelling multilateral security dialogue and cooperation has already been in accumulation and atmosphere favoring

such dialogue and cooperation has been brewing for a long time before the October 2002 nuclear crisis. The improvement of the relations between concerned parties and the détente of the general regional situation have created positive conditions for the future necessity of multilateral security dialogue.

In short, between the two nuclear crises, we may conclude or predict two main differences. First, there are different players involving in the solutions. Some engage in the crisis management from the very beginning while last time stood by idly, such as China and Russia; some fully engage this time while only partially last time, such as the ROK and Japan; and some still remain completely irrelevant while engaged in following up tasks last time, such as the European countries. Second and more important, the consequences will be different. Last crisis resulted in the US-DPRK Geneva Nuclear Framework and the KEDO both of which only related to the solution of the DPRK energy problem and the improvement of the US-DPRK bilateral relations. While this time the international counter-proliferation regime, more bilateral ties and the overall pattern in the Northeast Asia will be affected.

In other words, compared with 10 years ago, the nuclear crisis has involved from a bilateral political issue to a regional multilateral security issue even a global counter-proliferation issue. Therefore the ending of the recent nuclear crisis cannot be an exclusive US-DPRK agreement, though it is possible that within certain comprehensive agreement there might be a separate bilateral accord. Another reason why we can come to the second conclusion is that the directly concerned parties all adopted different strategic thinking and policy approaches aiming beyond the DPRK nuclear issue itself.

From Crisis to Opportunity

Under the collective effects of the above factors, two trends have come into being during this round nuclear crisis: “peaceful, diplomatic means” and “multilateral,

regional approaches”. Some argue that the Six-Party talks resemble the multilateral consultation framework imagined for years, which is also aiming at peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula-centered Northeast Asia. “The multilateral format supports the idea that this is a regional problem, not a bilateral US-DPRK issue, as North Korea contends.”¹ However, what matters is not the similarity in forms but inner connections in substances. Compared with last time, this nuclear crisis and the follow-up resolving efforts bear more regional security implications.

Of course credits should in the first place be given to the adjusted US policies. Bush Administration’s current multilateral policy towards the DPRK won popular support at home. As one US think-tank believes, that “The failure of China to participate as an enforcer of the 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework led to the situation we face today. The Bush administration was right to be firm in insisting on a multilateral format in addressing and resolving this issue.”²

On the other hand, the replacement of the 1994 format by the present Six-Party talks is also the certain outcome of the involution of the regional situation in the Northeast Asia in recent years. Increasingly closer interactions among regional players have made not only any attempts to solve the nuclear crisis by military means difficult but also multilateral solutions inevitable. Within the multilateral framework, all participants have both enthusiasm and clear crucial interests so that they can play either unique roles or common roles. Dr. Henry Kissinger supports the multilateral approach in addressing the DPRK nuclear issue and suggests “a multilateral reciprocal non-aggression pledge – not one that singles out the United States”. One of his arguments is that the nuclear issue harms not only the American interests, or in other words, it does not harm the American interests in the first place.³

¹ Peter Brookes: *The Six Party Talks: Same Bed, Different Dreams*, the Heritage Foundation Website, Aug. 26, 2003.

² Ibid.

³ Henry Kissinger: How to resolve North Korea situation, *the Washington Post*, Aug. 18th, 2003.

All kinds of outsiders expressed their deep concerns through the mass media over the possibilities of the “soft-landing” of the nuclear crisis and avoiding the war on the Peninsula. Few people did see the positive facet of the Crisis. In fact, the outbreak of the nuclear crisis provided us, though in an apparently negative way, an important opportunity to release the energy in favor of multilateral dialogues and cooperation accumulated since long time ago in the Northeast Asia.⁴

The Six-Party format and framework developed along the process of crisis solution have certain self-evident profound regional implications and model values:

It has some epoch-making significance regarding the international politics in the Northeast Asia. Since the East Asian modern state system established in the 19th Century, it is the first time that representatives from all regional countries talking to each other on an equal footing. It will certainly speed up the establishment of a new security mechanism in the Northeast Asia. On the other end of the tunnel may we eventually see not only the solution of the nuclear issue but also the formation of a new security order even the establishment of a peace mechanism on the Peninsula.

It provides us an important opportunity to defreeze the cold-war structure left in the Northeast Asia. Actually, the Northeast Asian alliances have been reshuffling and undoubtedly, the ending will be the relationship created in the cold war – no matter the Northern Triangle or the Southern Triangle – weakened. The concept of cross-recognition was first introduced in 1975. It took fifteen years for the USSR and

⁴ Scholars who believe bilateral military agreements more effective in safeguarding regional security think multilateral security dialogue mechanisms fragile, inefficient and vulnerable to contingencies. However if we look it from another angle, we may find the contingencies effective catalyst to multilateralism. Because after the impact and adjustment, participating countries will modify or change their policies and approaches to the multilateral mechanism and hence improve the effectiveness of the multilateral security cooperation mechanism in promoting regional peace and stability. The current nuclear crisis is such a contingency.

the ROK normalized their diplomatic relations in 1990. It will be another fifteen years by the year 2005. For me, it is very interesting to see whether the cross-recognition will be completed by that time.

What is more important to the international politics, it will affect the model of international dispute settlement in the 21st Century. Since 1990s, from the Gulf War to the Kosovo War, from the war on Afghanistan to the war on Iraq, most international disputes have been settled through military means. If the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula is to be solved through a series of peaceful negotiations, the diplomatic means will be proved to be still effective and applicable to modern international dispute settlement; and since the war is not omnipotent, it should not be worshiped any longer. In this sense, the peaceful solution of the nuclear crisis will significantly contribute to the international community.

Goal & Way

Multilateralism means more than three countries, abiding by common behavior code, jointly handle international issues through long-term cooperative and institutionalized methods. In the post-cold war era, however, the following reasons contributed to the multilateral diplomacy and communications being highlighted: first, big powers generally want to handle international peace and security-related issues through the UN in the wake of the collapse of the bipolar confrontational system; second, the development of regionalism after the cold war has not only provided opportunities of establishing regional multilateral conference and dialogue mechanisms, but also enriched the experiences of all countries; third, compared with the past, multilateral solution of the state-to-state disputes will reduce the individual country's responsibility and cost thus becomes more feasible and effective.

The practice of the CSCAP and ARF all proved the growing importance of the multilateralism in dealing with regional security issues under the new international

security environment after the cold war. In Northeast Asia, since the power of balance is undergoing some changes, multilateral security dialogue and policy coordination will obviously be conducive to enhancing mutual understanding and reducing hostility among regional countries. However it is noteworthy that the survival and growth of multilateralism in various regions will need different soil conditions owing to the diversified regional situations.

In short, the Northeast Asian multilateral security dialogue and cooperation must be based on the concepts of common security and cooperative security. Common security focuses on inter-dependence and common responsibility of safeguarding regional security by all regional countries. Individual country's security and survival are not achieved through hostility and threat to others but joint efforts in preventing crisis or war and defending peaceful security environment in the region. Cooperative security means the multi-dimensioned security issues must be addressed by cooperative efforts among states and emphasizes on the practice and mechanism of dialogues as the foundation for such efforts.⁵

In order to promote multilateral security dialogue and cooperation in the Northeast Asia, we must insist on the following principles: (1) such dialogue and cooperation must be achieved through widely consensus not powerful pressures or forcible means. It is not only because countries will resist forcible multilateral cooperation, but also because many regional security disputes cannot be solved by forcible arrangement; (2) the establishment of such dialogue and cooperation must

⁵ To foster the concepts of common security and cooperative security is the requirement of the principle of reciprocity in the multilateralism. Reciprocity means the rewards to the other's cooperative activities. In the eyes of the realists, competition always exists between countries and hence they are reluctant to engage in multilateral exchanges for the fear of others might achieve relative gains by conducting such contacts. However in reality, when countries observe the common norms and regulations, mutual benefits and absolute gains are not unusual in the multilateral exchanges. Therefore, abiding by the reciprocity principle, participating countries are actually building the collective good; their communications and interactions could reduce the uncertainty of the shadow of the future.

serve the overall regional interests of promoting security and mutual trust not specific bloc's influence or checking power.

Based on the above principles, when promoting multilateral security dialogue and cooperation in the Northeast Asia, we must coordinate the existing bilateral military relations with the multilateral security structure in the region and stress that the bilateral military agreements mustn't be power-balance-oriented and repressing the others so as not to let any country feel under threat or repression. If the military agreement is still targeting at specific country then confrontational state-to-state relations aiming at power-balance will remain and regional security and peace not be impossible. Generally speaking, bilateral military cooperation should make up an organic part of the multilateral security dialogue and cooperation in the region not an obstacle.

Based on the concepts of common security and cooperative security, multilateral security cooperation in the Northeast Asia should be advanced through both First Track and Second Track dialogues. Here First Track refers to the official regional security dialogues or forums. And Second Track means unofficial organizations, scholars, individuals and civil think tanks jointly discussing regional security issues. Multilateral security cooperation could have different formats, both official, governmental and unofficial, non-governmental.

As for specific issues like the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsular, we should, in the preliminary phase, emphasize on the CBMs and increasing the transparency. Experiences gained by the CSCAP and ARF have proven that through interactions and communications within the multilateral framework and by sticking to these two core issues, related countries could develop some common norms and understandings, enhance their mutual understanding particularly of each other's weakness and vulnerabilities, and eventually give up or moderate their confrontational or deterrent security and military policies.