Northeast Asia Regionalism: A (Possible) Means to an End for Washington

By Ralph A. Cossa

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Executive Summary

This paper addresses the place of Northeast Asia regionalism in US foreign policy and defines how much (or little) importance the task of building a regional security architecture is to the United States in its overall East Asia foreign policy agenda. It focuses on the currently ill-fated Six-Party Talks (involving North and South Korea, China, Japan, Russia, and the US) and how this Korean Peninsula denuclearization process both informs and impacts US attitudes toward Northeast Asia regional cooperation.

It also puts the quest for a regional security architecture in broader perspective, arguing that it is not an end in itself but one means of achieving the desired end of a more peaceful and stable Northeast Asia, one in which the US continues to play a constructive part. To this end, it examines the January 2010 speech on East Asia regional architecture by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and outlines how the five "guiding principles" of the Obama administration remain consistent with long-standing US views toward regional multilateral institutions.

It should be noted at the onset that there are three parallel efforts underway in terms of regional cooperation, at the Asia-Pacific, East Asia, and Northeast Asia levels, respectively. This paper will focus on the latter but the other two cannot be ignored since these parallel efforts impact how and if the states of Northeast Asia cooperate. The US has long promoted regional cooperation but has focused more on Asia-Pacific regionalism than on Northeast Asia regionalism for a number of reasons that will be expounded upon in this paper. Meanwhile, many regional states seem to prefer the middle alternative, East Asia multilateralism, with or without the United States. It is also useful to remember that building an architecture differs from promoting regional cooperation or ad hoc cooperation toward a specific task, although the latter can help lay the groundwork for the former if successful.

As have all its predecessors, the Obama administration has stressed that it sees its bilateral alliances and emerging multilateral security mechanisms as mutually supportive, not mutually exclusive. Nonetheless, it must be sensitive to accusations that its alliance network is a "vestige of the Cold War" and take greater pain in articulating how existing alliances compliment the broader multilateral cooperative security effort. For that matter, it must also resolve the potential conflict inherent in the previous administration's penchant for focusing on "coalitions of the willing" to address growing security challenges – the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and Six-Party Talks being two prominent examples of such coalitions – even while proclaiming the centrality of the alliance network.

The current Asia-Pacific alliance structure (which includes alliances with Australia, Thailand, and the Philippines as well as the ROK and Japan) will and should continue to enjoy pride of place; multilateral and regional cooperative and community building efforts are only supported to the extent that they do not interfere with or undermine the traditional bilateral alliance structure. This is the way it has been for the past several decades and it has not changed with the Obama administration, its general receptivity to multilateral cooperation notwithstanding.

Through continued active participation in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) "gathering of economies" and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Obama administration will continue to demonstrate Washington's continued commitment to multilateral cooperation and broader efforts at Asia-Pacific community building. One hopes that it will also be supportive of East Asia initiatives that do not include the US (such as ASEAN Plus Three) and demonstrate this support by participating in the East Asia Summit at some point. In short, the Obama administration must stress that its commitment to, and preference for, pan-Pacific institutions (like ARF and APEC) in which it participates does not indicate hostility toward or a lack of appreciation for pan-Asian multilateral efforts which, through building a sense of East Asia community, can help move the broader agenda forward . . . as long as these organizations are not aimed at undercutting or diminishing the US role or interests in the Asia-Pacific region.

The area where current trends toward regional cooperation appear most fruitful is in the apparent willingness of current multilateral mechanisms and even bilateral dialogues to address nontraditional security concerns and issues such as climate change and environmental degradation. These are less controversial areas where habits of cooperation can and are being built. Even the ARF, long branded as a "talk shop" recently conducted a disaster relief exercise involving navies and coast guards from around the region. The Obama administration's receptiveness to seriously addressing them has opened new doors of cooperation which can pay future dividends in terms of regional confidence and trust building.

Meanwhile, support for Northeast Asia regional architecture building is likely to be placed on the back burner until North Korea rejoins the Six-Party Talks and honors its earlier denuclearization commitments or the other states of Northeast Asia decide to formalize their efforts to jointly contain the North Korean nuclear threat. Absent normalization of relations between Washington and Pyongyang – which in my view must come after or at best simultaneously with denuclearization – or a decision by the other five to proceed in this direction without Pyongyang (which China for one still seems reticent to do), it seems hard to imagine a comprehensive formalized Northeast Asia dialogue mechanism being created any time soon.

Nonetheless, the Six-Party Talks has been useful in combating Pyongyang's "divide and conquer" or "salami" tactics and has helped keep Washington's two Northeast Asia allies firmly tied into the DPRK denuclearization process. It has also served as a useful vehicle for building and testing Sino-US cooperation. As a result, this multilateral mechanism has been more useful in building and supporting Washington's bilateral relationships in Northeast Asia than it has been at laying the foundation upon which to build a Northeast Asia security architecture.

Northeast Asia Regionalism:
A (Possible) Means to an End for Washington

by Ralph A. Cossa

This paper addresses the place of Northeast Asia regionalism in US foreign policy and is aimed at helping both a US and global audience better understand how much (or little) importance the task of building a regional security architecture is to the US in its overall East Asia foreign policy agenda. It focuses in particular on the currently ill-fated Six-Party Talks (involving North and South Korea, China, Japan, Russia, and the US) and how this Korean Peninsula denuclearization process both informs and impacts US attitudes toward Northeast Asia regional cooperation. It also puts the quest for a regional security architecture in broader perspective, arguing that it is not an end in itself but one means of achieving the desired end of a more peaceful stable Northeast Asia, one in which the US continues to play a constructive part.

It should be noted at the onset that there are three parallel efforts underway in terms of regional cooperation, at the Asia-Pacific, East Asia, and Northeast Asia levels respectively. This paper will focus on the latter but the other two cannot be ignored since these parallel efforts impact how and if the states of Northeast Asia cooperate. The US has long promoted regional cooperation but has focused more on Asia-Pacific regionalism than on Northeast Asia regionalism for a number of reasons that will be expounded upon in this paper. Meanwhile, many regional states seem to prefer the middle alternative, East Asia multilateralism, with or without the United States.

The experience of the Six-Party Talks has reinforced rather than changed the view regarding both the difficulties and limitations of Northeast Asia regionalism, even though Washington (and all the other parties, with the notable exception of Pyongyang) appear to remain committed to the process, mostly (one suspects) for lack of any viable alternative. Some would argue that without North Korea's active involvement, Northeast Asia regionalism would be incomplete. Others point out that finding a common denominator low enough to incorporate North Korea into the possible regional structure is likely to ensure its irrelevance (and that's assuming a common denominator can be found).[1] I lean toward the latter view, unless and until North Korea makes the strategic decision to give up its nuclear weapons and allows itself to be integrated into the Northeast Asian community of nations.

Finally, it is useful to remember at the onset that building an architecture differs from promoting regional cooperation or ad hoc cooperation toward a specific task, although the latter can help lay the groundwork for the former if successful. This paper concludes that the current primary role of Northeast Asia regional cooperation, as manifested in the Six-Party Talks and from a US perspective, is more to deal with (and balance) bilateral issues – US-DPRK denuclearization, alliance management with Japan and the ROK, and US-China relations – than it is to lay the groundwork for developing a Northeast Asia regional security architecture.

Defining the Region and US Priorities

The United States has long seen itself as a major actor and "resident power" in Asia and sees the ideal regional security architecture – both for Northeast Asia and East Asia writ large – as one that not only builds upon (rather than replaces or renders obsolete) the existing US bilateral security alliances but also sees the United States as a member of any future Northeast Asian security community.

For the purposes of this paper, the going in assumption is that the US is *of* Northeast Asia, even if not geographically *in* Northeast Asia and will and wants to remain a major player in the region, even if others may see the "ideal" Northeast Asia as one in which the US is less engaged. When I address Northeast Asia regional integration, therefore, I am talking about the Korean Peninsula (at some point hopefully unified but today comprised of both the ROK and DPRK), China, Japan, Russia, and the United States. I am also inclined to add Mongolia to the mix and only somewhat less inclined to add Canada, even though both will be ignored for the purpose of this discussion.[2]

What should not be ignored, but frequently is, is Taiwan, which must be factored in, since it remains a "core issue" between Washington and Beijing and a key factor in assessing both regional stability and the role of (or concerns about) the US-Japan alliance, at least from Beijing's perspective. Simply put, there can be no long-term regional stability or true regional integration without a successful resolution of the Taiwan issue. Again, for the purposes of this paper, Taiwan will not be dwelled upon, beyond periodic reminders to the reader that it cannot be ignored.

Alliances Come First

In terms of foreign policy priorities, sustaining and reinvigorating Washington's bilateral alliances with Japan and Korea enjoy first priority, followed closely by the development of a "positive, cooperative, and comprehensive" relationship with China. While the future and fate of the US alliance network is not dwelled upon here, given the focus of the paper, readers should note that the Obama administration, like all its predecessors, has made it clear that Washington's bilateral security alliances with Tokyo and Seoul are the base upon which broader multilateral cooperation will be built. Indeed, when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton laid out the guiding principles defining US engagement in East Asia, her first principle was "the United States' alliance relationships are the cornerstone of our regional involvement."[3] From a US perspective, bilateral alliances and multilateral cooperation are not "either-or"; they complement and reinforce one another.

Regional mechanisms promote cooperation and greater trust and understanding and thus help avoid conflict but are not prepared (and generally not willing) to deal with crises once they occur. The US looks to its alliance network or to ad hoc coalitions that usually include allies and other like-minded friends to deal with conflict, aggression, or even catastrophe. The US forward military presence, made possible in large part by

alliance basing and host nation support agreements in Japan and Korea, underscores and provides credibility to the US defense commitment.

This does not imply a continued significant military force presence or base structure in Northeast Asia *ad infinitum*. If and when the North Korea issue resolves itself,[4] then US force levels should and likely will be adjusted accordingly. But the alliance relationships themselves are, in this author's opinion, critical for future regional stability and thus should remain. One should look at the US-Australia relationship today as one potential model for future US-Japan and/or US-ROK alliance relations. There are no large US bases in Australia, nor are there significant numbers of US military forces based there on a permanent or even rotating basis. But the alliance remains strong. The two sides exercise and fight together and remain highly interoperable. With a benign security environment in Northeast Asia, similar relationships can be sustained with Tokyo and Seoul. These, in turn, will help sustain the benign security environment and provide a foundation upon which to build Northeast Asia regional cooperation.

If Washington's alliances with Tokyo and Seoul provide the "foundation" upon which current (and future) US Asia policy is built, that foundation, while generally solid, seems in need of reinforcement and reinvigoration today, especially (but not exclusively) in light of the threat posed by North Korea's unrepentant and apparently relentless pursuit of nuclear weapons. Even during the period in the last two years of the Bush administration when some progress on the Korean Peninsula denuclearization front seemed to be in evidence, there were serious questions raised as to whether Pyongyang had made the "strategic decision" to give up its nuclear weapons program in return for security guarantees and significant economic "incentives." Today, all but the most hard-core optimists (or DPRK apologists) have concluded, based on definitive statements and actions by Pyongyang, that that decision has been made. As the North's *KCNA* news agency stated unequivocally (in response to UNSC Resolution 1874, which was itself in response to Pyongyang's May 2009 nuclear weapons test): "It has become an absolutely impossible option for the DPRK to even think about giving up its nuclear weapons."[5]

The perception during the final Bush years that Washington was focused primarily on nonproliferation – keeping whatever nuclear capability that existed in North Korea in North Korea (and out of the hands of terrorists) – raised concerns that the US was prepared to live with a nuclear-armed North Korea. This raised concerns, which continue to be expressed both in Tokyo and Seoul, about the credibility of the US nuclear umbrella and US extended deterrence. While the Obama administration has held firm in demanding complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization, fears remain that Washington might eventually yield to DPRK demands and accept North Korea as a *de facto* nuclear weapons state. Similar concerns are being raised by other US friends and allies and by China as well.

Pyongyang's current refusal to return to six-party deliberations keeps both the threat and concerns alive. The Obama administration faces a dilemma (deliberately created and advanced by Pyongyang): it can either accept North Korea's demand for direct bilateral negotiations and try to do something about its growing nuclear

capabilities, at the risk of undercutting and marginalizing its South Korean and Japanese allies (not to mention China), or it can hold fast to its demand for multilateral negotiations and in the meantime stand idly by and watch as Pyongyang further develops its nuclear arsenal – it recently claimed that "reprocessing of spent fuel rods is at its final phase and extracted plutonium is being weaponized" and that "experimental uranium enrichment has successfully been conducted to enter into completion phase"[6] (although it is impossible to declare with any certainty just what Pyongyang has been doing at its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon and elsewhere or what kind or how advanced its uranium enrichment program is). In this case, insisting on a multilateral response is, in effect, putting the bilateral alliances first, due to the recognition that cutting Seoul and Tokyo out of the process, while perhaps marginally improving the prospects of progress on the denuclearization front, could create a crisis of confidence among the allies themselves.

Building a 'Positive, Cooperative, Comprehensive' Sino-US Relationship

A few words about Sino-US relations are also in order before going into a deeper discussion of Northeast Asia regionalism. The US-China relationship is one of the most important bilateral relationships in the world. Even before the global financial crisis, the bilateral relationship was becoming more and more complex and its impact was being felt throughout Asia and beyond. Today, the two nations face a growing number of political, economic, and security concerns which can best, perhaps only, be solved if there is cooperation between Beijing and Washington.

This is not to imply, however, that the two, working alone, can solve the global financial crisis or other world problems by themselves. For important geopolitical and security as well as economic reasons, Washington can not appear to be ignoring or overlooking Tokyo or its European partners, even as it reaches out to broaden and deepen its economic cooperation with Beijing. If the bilateral US-China relationship is among the world's most important, many in Washington (and at least one voice in Honolulu) would assert that the US-Japan relationship (echoing former Ambassador and US Senator Mike Mansfield) is still "*the* most important bilateral relationship in the world today – bar none." This is not to imply a "zero sum" game between Tokyo and Beijing; from a US perspective, both relationships are critical.

As important as economic cooperation is today in the face of the global economic challenge, this represents just a small dimension of the overall Sino-US relationship. We face a myriad of challenges where our mutual interests are threatened and where common solutions or approaches are the best – but regrettably not always the only – way forward. On the plus side, there has been increased cooperation between Washington and Beijing in pursing the common goal of Korean Peninsula denuclearization and the two sides have reached a kind of consensus on keeping stability in the Taiwan Strait. But different approaches and priorities between the two governments make future tensions all too possible, over both issues, and over issues as diverse as Iran, or Darfur, or Africa, or Latin America (not to mention Burma or Tibet).

The good news is that both sides seem committed to trust-building and enhanced cooperation. The April 1, 2009 "Statement on Bilateral Meeting with President Hu of China" put out by the White House notes that during the Hu-Obama meeting, both leaders "agreed to work together to build a positive, cooperative, and comprehensive US-China relationship for the 21st century." They agreed to establish a "US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue" with Secretary of State Clinton and Chinese State Councilor Dai Bingguo chairing the "Strategic Track" and Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and Chinese Vice Premier Wang Qishan chairing the "Economic Track." What a difference the word "and" makes. During the Bush administration there was a "Strategic Economic Dialogue" but the focus was almost exclusively on "economic." Now, the dialogue can truly become strategic, assuming that all the above-mentioned security issues will now be put on the table and seriously discussed (a huge and largely untested assumption).

The initiation of the Strategic and Economic Dialogue between Washington and Beijing increases the need for Beijing, Washington, and Tokyo to engage in high-level trilateral dialogue to help ensure that improved Sino-US strategic ties do not strain US-Japan relations. Ever since normalization, US presidents have believed that it was possible – indeed necessary – for Washington to simultaneously have good relations with both Tokyo and Beijing. The George W. Bush administration, for all its faults elsewhere, did a pretty good job of balancing the two bilaterals, providing a good basis upon which the Obama administration appears intent on building.

Regional mechanisms provide additional forums in which bilateral and trilateral cooperation can take place, but the track record to date has been mixed at best. Many Chinese openly question why Japan needs to be in the six-party mix and (in my view inaccurately) blamed Japan's "obsession" with the North Korean abduction issue as hampering denuclearization talks (although this is now a moot issue, at least until or unless talks resume). When Sino-US relations are strained, multilateral forums all too often become "battlefields" where each (verbally) shoots at one another.

Regional Cooperation

At the broad conceptual level, I would argue that today (at least from a US perspective) Northeast Asia regionalism is seen as a possible means toward the end of promoting regional stability but has thus far generally been viewed as a tool with only limited utility. This is not due to a rejection of regionalism per se but due to the difficulty of creating a broad regional approach to security in Northeast Asia, given the diversity of the states involved and their varying degree of confidence in the United States and in one another. As a general rule, the Six-Party Talks process has underscored and magnified these differences more than it has helped to close existing gaps.

There was a period of time during the George W. Bush administration when developing a Northeast Asia architecture seemed to enjoy a degree of prominence; rumor had it that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had attached a certain priority to pursuing this objective. Ironically (but perhaps not coincidentally), that interest waned about the

first time she participated in an informal session with her other six-party foreign minister counterparts along the sidelines of an ASEAN Regional Forum Meeting.

For its part, the Obama administration seems committed to keeping the Six-Party Talks going but this does not equate to support or enthusiasm for broader institutionalized Northeast Asia regional cooperation (just as signing the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation – which the Obama administration did in July 2009 – does not necessarily equate to joining the East Asia Summit, which is the primary architecture-building mechanism in East Asia writ large). Discussions of Five-Party Talks (sans North Korea) are likewise more aimed at dealing with a specific issue (North Korean denuclearization) than the establishment of a broader approach toward regional cooperation or institution building.

Instead, Secretary Clinton laid out four additional guiding principles that Washington would use in examining East Asia regionalism writ large. The five principles are paraphrased as follows:

- First, the United States' alliance relationships are the cornerstone of our regional involvement.
- Second, regional institutions and efforts should work to advance our clear and increasingly shared objectives: enhancing security and stability, expanding economic opportunity and growth, and fostering democracy and human rights. To promote regional security, we must address nuclear proliferation, territorial disputes, and military competition.
- Third, our institutions must be effective and be focused on delivering results; they should be motivated by concrete, pragmatic considerations and embrace efficient decision-making processes and, where appropriate, differentiated roles and responsibilities.
- Fourth, we must seek to maintain and enhance flexibility in pursuing the results we seek; we will participate in informal arrangements targeted to specific challenges, and we will support sub-regional institutions that advance the shared interests of groups of neighbors.
- Fifth, we need to decide, as Asia-Pacific nations, which will be the defining regional institutions; it's important that we do a better job of trying to define which organizations will best protect and promote our collective future.

In examining the current state of play, one must acknowledge a number of regional institution-building efforts currently underway with varying levels of US support/involvement and varying definitions of "the region," and judge them against these guiding principles.

ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)

The 26-member ARF[7] brings together foreign ministers from throughout and beyond the Asia-Pacific region for annual security-oriented discussions. While initially focused exclusively on East Asia, the introduction of more South Asian members in recent years should be ringing warning bells about the ARF's future focus and effectiveness. Broadening its membership reduces the ARF's attractiveness as a framework for East Asian or Asia-Pacific community building, although the presence of all key Northeast Asian players (except Taiwan) does permit occasional six-party (and more) side discussions on Northeast Asia security issues.

Generally speaking, the ARF seems well-suited to serve as the consolidating and validating instrument behind many security initiatives proposed by governments and at non-official gatherings. Various ARF study groups have provided a vehicle to move multilateral security cooperation forward in areas such as preventive diplomacy, enhanced confidence building, counter-proliferation, counter-terrorism, and maritime (including search and rescue) cooperation, all of which help promote greater transparency and military-to-military cooperation.[8] But its contribution to the regional security order remains somewhat constrained.

Few expect the ARF to solve the region's problems or even to move rapidly or pro-actively to undertake that mission. The agreement to "move at a pace comfortable to all participants" seemed aimed at tempering the desire of more Western-oriented members for immediate results in favor of the "evolutionary" approach preferred by the ASEAN states, which sees the process as being as (or more) important as its eventual substantive products.[9] The Asian preference for "noninterference in internal affairs" also has traditionally placed some important topics essentially off limits, although this may be changing (witness ASEAN's increased willingness to comment on Myanmar's domestic politics). Nonetheless, the evolution of the ARF from a confidence building measures "talk shop" to a true preventive diplomacy mechanism (as called for in its 1995 Concept Paper) promises to be a long and difficult one.[10]

Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)

At an even broader Asia-Pacific level there is the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) "gathering of economies,"[11] which involves a number of Latin America participants.[12] While primarily aimed at managing the effects of growing economic interdependence, APEC has had an important political and security role, as a result of its regular annual Leaders' Meetings, which have become an important vehicle for fostering political relations in addition to raising the level of economic dialogue and putting pressure on the region's leaders (and especially the host state) to move the process forward.[13]

While APEC is, first and foremost, aimed at promoting free trade and economic cooperation, the assembled leaders also address terrorism and nonproliferation-related issues and also issue statements dealing with nontraditional security concerns, such as

pandemic disease, natural disasters, and ensuring reliable supplies of energy. President Obama is scheduled to attend his first APEC session this November in Singapore and is expected to host the 2011 session somewhere in the United States (hopefully Honolulu).

As with the ARF, APEC will remain more suited to talking about security problems than to actually helping to implement solutions. In addition to the usual drawbacks associated with East Asian multilateralism, APEC has the added "problem" of including Taiwan. Rather than using this venue as a vehicle for incorporating Taiwanese views and concerns into the regional security debate in a quasi-non-governmental setting, Beijing has tried to block any substantive security-oriented activities and to further isolate Taiwan from the dialogue process, a practice that has not been significantly tempered despite the improved cross-Strait atmosphere.

While Washington and many of its regional allies (especially Australia and Japan) attach great importance to APEC (and secondly to the ARF), many in ASEAN and others among its neighbors (especially China) seem to be placing more emphasis and value on East Asia sub-regional (as opposed to broader Asia-Pacific) institutions and community building efforts, such as ASEAN Plus Three (APT) and the East Asia Summit (EAS), which currently do not include the US.

ASEAN Plus Three and the East Asia Summit

While Washington focuses on ad hoc initiatives and Asia-Pacific regionalism, the states of East Asia have continued their community-building efforts. In December 2005, Malaysia convened the first East Asia Summit involving the 10 ASEAN leaders, their Plus Three partners (China, Japan, and South Korea), plus Australia, New Zealand, and India. Russian President Vladimir Putin was also invited to meet with, but not to officially join, the other 16 assembled leaders at the first annual EAS.[14]

Still undefined five years later is how the EAS (or the APT, for that matter) will interact with broader regional organizations such as APEC or the ARF. To its credit, the Chairman's Statement from the second EAS "confirmed our view that the EAS complements other existing regional mechanisms, including the ASEAN dialogue process, the ASEAN Plus Three process, the ARF, and APEC in community building efforts."[15] Details as to how these various efforts will mesh or work together are still lacking, however.

The big question today is, will the US join the EAS? No decision has yet been made but the US signing of ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) during last year's annual ASEAN-US Dialogue along the sidelines of the July 2009 ARF now removes any hurdles to moving forward. Given that the APT has been clearly designated as the preferred East Asia community-building mechanism and the EAS provides a direct link to this "Asia for Asians" forum, a US decision to join the EAS would make a great deal of sense to this author.[16]

The Bush administration balked at joining the EAS for at least three reasons: one, it requires members to sign the TAC, second it remains unclear just what the EAS' mission and objectives are – it's described as a "leaders'-led" dialogue without a great deal of structure – and, finally, because joining would require two presidential trips annually to Asia (which is not always true, since APEC meetings are frequently in non-Asian states, such as Peru in 2008 and Sydney in 2007). The first problem has been resolved. The third could also be easily handled by arranging the APEC and EAS Summits back-to-back or in close proximity to one another during years when APEC is held in Asia; given the degree of overlap between the two meetings, most leaders would probably welcome this approach. It would also help guarantee at least one Asia visit a year by the US president when APEC is held elsewhere.

As to the agenda, what better way to help influence it than to sign up and attend? ASEAN and its Plus Three partners have already made it clear that ASEAN Plus Three is the primary vehicle for East Asia community building and that the EAS is the mechanism most closely associated with and involved in this effort. Simply put, if the Obama administration wants to have a role in and otherwise been seen as supportive of the East Asia community building process, it should join the EAS. Otherwise, the process will surely proceed without it and it will cede leadership in Asia to others.

Track-Two Initiatives

There are also a large number of other regional initiatives including at the track-two (nongovernmental) level: the Shangri-La Dialogue (which involves defense officials from throughout and beyond the region) and the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) which links think tanks from throughout the region and has developed a close working relationship with the ARF. CSCAP's North Pacific Security Framework Study Group (which involves all Six-Party Talks members plus Canada and Mongolia and is open to participation by others – including Taiwan scholars in their private capacity) has been involved in examining Northeast Asia security architecture issues for a number of years, as has the six-party Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD) at the track 1.5 level.

Six-Party Talks

The Six-Party Talks represents the best example of task-oriented ad hoc multilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia. This flexible, informal arrangement targeting a specific challenge (Clinton's fourth principle) was established by the Bush administration to deal with the specific issue of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The talks were also intended, and served, to multilateralize what many initially viewed as a bilateral US-DPRK problem.

The creation of the six-party process may represent one of the Bush administration's finest diplomatic hours.[17] This initiative draws from the lessons learned during the 1993/94 North Korea nuclear crisis, where – despite close coordination and consultation – Washington was widely perceived as unilaterally cutting a deal with

Pyongyang before sticking Seoul and Tokyo with the bill. While Pyongyang argued for bilateral consultations (and a separate US-DPRK non-aggression pact or peace treaty), Washington rightfully insisted this time that participation by Seoul and Tokyo was "essential." It also acknowledges the important role that China, and to a lesser extent Russia, must play if multilateral security guarantees are to be part of the final solution (as most would agree they are). Finally, the Bush administration recognized and tried to work around Pyongyang's strategy of trying to play all sides against one another by presenting different, conflicting messages depending on the audience.

The Obama administration has made clear its preference for the Six-Party Talks to continue despite Pyongyang's current "absolute rejection" of this dialogue vehicle.[18] But to date it has not taken a position on Northeast Asia (or broader) regional institution-building per se. If one does a word search of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's Senate confirmation transcripts or her scene-setting Asia Society speech prior to her first visit to Asia, for example, you will find zero hits for regionalism, architecture, etc. To date, support for the Six-Party Talks has been focused exclusively on the forum's original role as a vehicle for Korean Peninsula denuclearization.

Nonetheless, the creation of the Six-Party Talks mechanism – which contains within it a Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism Working Group (chaired by Russia) which is supposed to be addressing the question of a future regional security architecture – provides a framework for broader Northeast Asia multilateral cooperation in the future. If the Talks eventually succeed, most parties agree that a more formalized mechanism must evolve to implement the agreement, provide necessary security assurances, and monitor compliance, as well as facilitate whatever aid packages are associated with the final accord. If the Talks fail, some (this author included) would argue that there will be an even greater need for some form of institutionalized cooperation in order to manage the danger posed by a nuclear weapons-equipped North Korea, if the other parties are prepared for this level of cooperation. If and how the six-party mechanism transitions into a more institutionalized Northeast Asia forum will help determine the degree of future security cooperation in this East Asia subregion and Washington's involvement in it.

As indicated in my introductory comments, I believe it might be easier to start the building process without North Korea than to create a mechanism built on a common denominator low enough to include Pyongyang. The fact that China and Russia – while still not fully persuaded – appear more receptive today than ever to initiating five-way talks to deal with North Korea's continued lack of cooperation also increases the prospects both of developing habits of cooperation essential to institutionalized regionalism and also to speaking with one voice in response to Pyongyang's threats. As a case in point, Secretary of State Clinton apparently used their common presence in Thailand to meet with the other four six-party foreign ministers – but not with Pyongyang's representative – to craft a joint response calling on Pyongyang to give up its nuclear weapons.

In addition, the various trilaterals and broader efforts (at the governmental and track two levels) – including the Plus Three Dialogue (Japan, ROK, China) which used to be linked specifically to ASEAN but which is now tentatively venturing out on its own; the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) involving the US, Japan, and ROK (and aimed primarily at coordinating policy toward the DPRK) and the embryonic US-Japan-China Dialogue, which was supposed to have been initiated this past summer but is now apparently on hold as a result of Chinese reluctance – are also creating habits of cooperation that can provide a foundation for future Northeast Asia regional cooperation.

Future Outlook and Conclusion

As have all its predecessors, the Obama administration has stressed that it sees its bilateral alliances and emerging multilateral security mechanisms as mutually supportive, not mutually exclusive. Nonetheless, it must be sensitive to accusations that its alliance network is a "vestige of the Cold War" and take greater pain in articulating how existing alliances compliment the broader multilateral cooperative security effort. For that matter, it must also resolve the potential conflict inherent in the previous administration's penchant for focusing on "coalitions of the willing" to address growing security challenges – the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and Six-Party Talks being two prominent examples of such coalitions – even while proclaiming the centrality of the alliance network.

The current Asia-Pacific alliance structure (which includes alliances with Australia, Thailand, and the Philippines as well as the ROK and Japan) will and should continue to enjoy pride of place; multilateral and regional cooperative and community building efforts are only supported to the extent that they do not interfere with or undermine the traditional bilateral alliance structure. This is the way it has been for the past several decades and it has not changed with the Obama administration, its general receptivity to multilateral cooperation notwithstanding.

Through active participation in APEC and the ARF, the Obama administration will likely continue to demonstrate Washington's continued commitment to multilateral cooperation and broader efforts at Asia-Pacific community building. One hopes that it will also be supportive of East Asia initiatives that do not include the US (such as the APT) and demonstrate this support by participating in the EAS at some point. In short, the Obama administration must stress that its commitment to, and preference for, pan-Pacific institutions (like ARF and APEC) in which it participates does not indicate hostility toward or a lack of appreciation for pan-Asian multilateral efforts which, through building a sense of East Asia community, can help move the broader agenda forward … as long as these organizations are not aimed at undercutting or diminishing the US role or interests in the Asia-Pacific region.

The area where current trends toward regional cooperation appear most fruitful is in the apparent willingness of current multilateral mechanisms and even bilateral dialogues to address nontraditional security concerns and issues such as climate change

and environmental degradation. These are less controversial areas where habits of cooperation can and are being built. Even the ARF, long branded as a "talk shop" recently conducted a disaster relief exercise involving navies and coast guards from around the region. The Obama administration's receptiveness to seriously addressing them has opened new doors of cooperation which can pay future dividends in terms of regional confidence and trust building.

Meanwhile, support for Northeast Asia regional architecture building is likely to be placed on the back burner until North Korea rejoins the Six-Party Talks and honors its earlier denuclearization commitments or the other states of Northeast Asia decide to formalize their efforts to jointly contain the North Korean nuclear threat. Absent normalization of relations between Washington and Pyongyang – which in my view must come after or at best simultaneously with denuclearization – or a decision by the other five to proceed in this direction without Pyongyang (which China for one still seems reticent to do), it seems hard to imagine a comprehensive formalized Northeast Asia dialogue mechanism being created any time soon.

Nonetheless, the Six-Party Talks has been useful in combating Pyongyang's "divide and conquer" or "salami" tactics and has helped keep Washington's two Northeast Asia allies firmly tied into the DPRK denuclearization process. It has also served as a useful vehicle for building and testing Sino-US cooperation. As a result, this multilateral mechanism has been more useful in building and supporting Washington's bilateral relationships in Northeast Asia than it has been at laying the foundation upon which to build a Northeast Asia security architecture.

About the Author

Ralph A. Cossa is President of the Pacific Forum CSIS in Honolulu, a non-profit, foreign policy research institute affiliated with the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, D.C. He is senior editor of the Forum's quarterly electronic journal, *Comparative Connections.* Mr. Cossa is a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Experts and Eminent Persons Group. He is a founding member and current international co-chair of the multinational track two Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP). He co-chairs the CSCAP study group aimed at halting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Asia Pacific region and also serves as Executive Director of the US Member Committee (USCSCAP). He also serves on the Board of the Council on US-Korean Security Studies and the National Committee on US-China Relations (NY) and is a member of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (London). He is a frequent contributor to regional newspapers, including the *Japan Times, Korea Times,* and *International Herald Tribune.* His most recent works are *The United States and the Asia-Pacific Region: Security Strategy for the Obama Administration* (Washington DC: Center for a New American Security, 2009); "US-Japan Relations: What Should Washington Do?" in *America's Role in Asia: Recommendations for US Policy from Both Sides of the Pacific* (San Francisco: Asia Foundation, 2008), pp. 207-218; and *An East Asian Community and the United States,* Ralph A. Cossa and Akihiko Tanaka, eds., (Washington, D.C.: CSIS Press, 2007).

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ENDNOTES:

[1] On the other hand, North Korea has proven itself capable and at times all too willing to provide the common denominator upon which the other Northeast Asia states could collaborate, but the task here has been Korean Peninsula denuclearization or dealing with a Pyongyang that refuses to follow that path, rather than architecture building per se.

[2] I recognize that some would prefer to ignore Russia as well. I think this would be a mistake. Not only can Russia be useful in dealing with North Korea (where it is at least slightly more trusted than China), it can be highly disruptive if left out or marginalized.

[3] Hillary Clinton, "Regional Architecture in Asia: Principles and Priorities," East-West Center, Honolulu, HI, Jan. 12, 2010.

[4] Either through the North's absorption by the South (the preferred solution) or through some form of federation or confederation agreement that brings about genuine peaceful coexistence.

[5] "DPRK Foreign Ministry Declares Strong Counter- Measures against UNSC's 'Resolution 1874'," *KCNA*, Pyongyang, June 13, 2009.

[6] "DPRK Permanent Representative Sends Letter to President of UNSC," *KCNA*, Pyongyang, Sept. 4, 2009.

[7] The 10 ASEAN states (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar/Burma, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam), plus Australia, Canada, China, the European Union, India, Japan, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Russia, South Korea, North Korea, New Zealand, and the United States, plus most recently Pakistan, Timor-Leste, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.

[8] See, for example, the "Statement by the Chairman of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) on the Terrorist Acts of the 11th September 2001, Bandar Seri Begawan, 4 October 2001," and the "ASEAN Regional Forum Statement on Strengthening Transport Security Against International Terrorism," and "ASEAN Regional Forum Statement on Non-Proliferation," issued during the July 2, 2004 Jakarta, Indonesia ARF meeting. Such statements have become regular attachments to ARF Chairman Statements and are frequently echoed at ASEAN Summits.

[9] For the ARF's guiding principles, see the "Chairman's Statement: the First ASEAN Regional Forum, Bangkok, Thailand, July 25, 1994." <http://www.aseansec.org/2105.htm> (accessed Sept. 28, 2007).

[10] For more background on the ARF, see "The ASEAN Regional Forum: A Concept Paper," Dept. of State, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Washington DC, July 15, 2002.

[11] APEC is not referred to as a gathering of states or governments due to the presence in its ranks of Hong Kong and Taiwan.

[12] APEC started out as an informal dialogue group, growing from an original 12 members (Australia, Brunei, Canada, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and the United States) in 1989 to 15 in 1991 (with the addition of China., Hong Kong, and "Chinese Taipei") to its current

strength of 21, with the addition of Mexico and Papua New Guinea (1993), Chile (1994), Peru, Russia, and Vietnam (1997). Institutionalization began in February 1993, when the APEC Secretariat was established in Singapore. For details, see "Key APEC Milestones," APEC web site. <http://www.apec.org/apec/about_apec/history.html>.

[13] A history of the Leaders' Meeting, and all associated documents, can be found on the APEC Secretariat web site. <http://www.apecsec.org.sg>

[14] For details, see the Chairman's Statement of the First East Asia Summit. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Dec. 14, 2005 [hereafter 2005 EAS Chairman's Statement] <http://www.aseansec.org/18104.htm>.

[15] Chairman's Statement of the Second East Asia Summit, Cebu, Philippines, Jan. 15, 2007. <http://www.aseansec.org/19303.htm> (accessed Sept. 28, 2007).

[16] For the author's rationale on why joining the EAS makes sense for the US, please see Ralph A. Cossa, "East Asia Community Building: Time for Washington to Get on Board," *Issues & Insights* Vol. 8, No. X, October 2008, available on the Pacific Forum CSIS web site [www.pacforum.org].

[17] Please note this refers to the *creation* of the multilateral process, not necessarily to its results to date. For background information on the Six-Party Talks process, see Scott Snyder, Ralph A. Cossa and Brad Glosserman, "The Six-Party Talks: Developing a Roadmap for Future Progress," *Issues & Insights* Vol. 5, No. 8, August 2005, available on the Pacific Forum CSIS Website <http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/issuesinsights_v05n08.pdf>. Read the "Regional Overview" and various Korea-related chapters of *Comparative Connections* [available at www.pacforum.org] for quarterly updates on the progress (or lack thereof) of the Talks.

[18] With North Korea, nothing ever seems to be really absolute. In fact, during an October 2009 visit by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, Kim Jong-il indicated that Pyongyang would be open to multilateral talks, even in the six-party format, but only after US-DPRK dialogue had resumed.