



Of Summitry, Peace Declarations, Peace Regimes and Security Mechanisms: What Are We Talking About? What Should We Be Thinking About?

By James J. Przystup

The surprise announcement of a second South-North Summit, to be held in Pyongyang, has revived speculation over the prospects for a historic peace declaration that could open the door to a new structure of peace on the Korean Peninsula. Meanwhile, as the Six-Party Talks move toward Phase II in the denuclearization of North Korea, policy wonks in Washington, Seoul, Tokyo, Beijing, Moscow, even Pyongyang, are sketching out frameworks for a Peace Regime on the Peninsula and a Peace Mechanism for Northeast Asia.

These constructs appear in the Sept. 19, 2005 Joint Statement issued in Beijing at the conclusion of the Fourth Round of Six Party Talks. Article 4 commits the “directly related parties” to negotiate “a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula at an appropriate separate forum.” The six parties also “agreed to explore ways and means for promoting security cooperation in Northeast Asia.” The latter effort was referred to a Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism Working Group, among the five working groups established in Beijing last February.

What does this mean? What are the implications for the U.S.?

Peace Regimes and Policy Directions

From a policy perspective, there are two distinct paths to two very different types of peace regimes. An exploration of the two options and outcomes should inform thinking and policy.

One path, in effect a well-defined “to do list,” ends in a peace regime that ratifies and supports a pre-existing, *de facto* state of peace. It results from a resolution of issues required to produce a state of peace.

On the Korean Peninsula, the first step down this path is the denuclearization of North Korea, without which peace on the Peninsula is unattainable. Other steps include agreement to replace the 1953 Armistice, to which the U.S., North Korea, and China are parties, with either a political agreement or peace treaty that would add South Korea to the signatories. Despite North Korea’s longstanding efforts to delegitimize the ROK, there can be no peace on the Peninsula absent true South-North reconciliation. Likewise, Seoul and Pyongyang should begin to implement the historic 1991 Basic Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression, and Cooperation and Exchange. Meanwhile, North Korea’s denuclearization would open the door to the normalization of U.S.-DPRK relations

In sum, all steps are aimed at actual threat reduction; collectively, they realize a state of peace and a supporting peace regime.

A second path is process oriented. On the Peninsula, many progressives see this as beginning with a “peace declaration,” which would usher in a peace regime. In this context, South and North would work incrementally to resolve individual issues and build mutual confidence in the expectation, or hope, that success in one area will build momentum toward resolution of other outstanding issues, culminating in Pyongyang’s agreement to surrender its arsenal of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Growing inter-Korean economic and travel ties can be viewed as elements of an informal, piecemeal process, which, by accretion, may realize a *de facto* peace regime. But, as Ambassador James Goodby acknowledges, a peace regime of this sort “cannot advance beyond a certain point” and “is not the same as full reconciliation and peaceful reunification.” That “certain point” is the commitment by governments to address the hard security issues of denuclearization and threat reduction.

This peace regime model, in effect, is a peace process and is best understood as such.

Embarking on it can be useful – provided it is understood as the start of a journey, not arrival at a destination. But, accepting process as a peace regime may give rise to expectations of peace without its actual realization. In a politically charged atmosphere, this could build ill-considered pressures against U.S. deployments in the ROK and, in turn, have profound consequences for the security interests of the U.S., the Republic of Korea, and Japan. In this regard, care must be taken lest any summit peace declaration be translated into calls for an early dismantling of the armistice system and disestablishment of the United Nations Command.

Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism

Tied to and inherently dependent on achieving denuclearization and creation of a Peninsula peace regime is the fate of the Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism. While not main actors in the development of a peninsular peace regime, Japan and Russia are parties to the six-party process and the building of the Northeast Asia security mechanism – Japan, by reason of the Working Group on the Normalization of Japan-North Korea Relations; Russia, through its chairing of the Peace and Security Mechanism Working Group. However, absent normalization of Japan-DPRK relations it is difficult to think of an effective Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism, much as diplomats might desire such an outcome.

Beyond time spent drawing up blueprints for such a structure, a larger question looms: to what end? For years, Europeanists looking at Asia have lamented the lack of multilateral security structures as have Northeast Asia's progressives, tired of the U.S.-dominated bilateral alliance structure. The Conference on Security Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) evolved out a Cold War bargain: sanctity of post-World War II borders and the Helsinki Human Rights baskets. The odds of North Korea and China agreeing to such an agenda are astronomical – they've read the book, seen the movie, and know how the story ends.

Agreeing to previously agreed-to principles of international conduct – the diplomatic equivalent of motherhood and apple pie – could launch a Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism, but what would it do?

Resolve unresolved borders? The list is long and inviting in Northeast Asia: the maritime Northern Limit Line (North and South Korea); Tokkdo/Takeshima (South Korea and Japan); the Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands (Japan and China); the maritime boundary in the East China Sea (Japan and China); the Northern Territories (Japan and Russia). But, all are inherently bilateral and politically sensitive sovereignty issues and, as such, do not lend themselves to third-party or multilateral mediation.

Will it make North Korea, China, and Russia, more transparent? Doubtful. Confidence building is perhaps one area. But, in reality, such efforts are already underway. Japan and China as well as Japan and the ROK are engaged in an exchange of military officers at their respective National Defense Universities. Later this year, Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force and the PLA Navy will exchange ships visits. Japan and the ROK have engaged in maritime search and rescue missions. Commercial air travel, tourism, and student exchanges have expanded exponentially across the region, and, with the exception of North Korea, commerce is booming. To be an effective part of this mix, CBMs will have to go beyond the proverbial search and rescue missions and address hard measures such as limited deployment areas.

Certainly nontraditional security issues, disaster relief, and search and rescue missions could benefit from multilateral efforts, but are such issues to be the *raison d'être* of a Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism? Will they sustain ministerial-level attention?

The Road Ahead

Building an enduring peace and security structure on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia requires policy to remain focused on core issues. The denuclearization of North Korea and the Korean Peninsula is the central objective of the on-going Six-Party Talks and the cornerstone of any enduring peace structure. It is the diplomatic *sine qua non*.

Building and sustaining the consensus on denuclearization among the six parties has required determined diplomacy. For its part, Seoul has agreed to keep South-North engagement "a half step behind" progress in the six-party forum. However, it should come as no surprise if Pyongyang, under the banner of Korean solidarity, were to seek to use the upcoming South-North Summit to leapfrog North-South engagement ahead of

progress in the six-party process. North Korean efforts at the summit to slow or derail denuclearization cannot be tolerated. Ultimately, the success of the Pyongyang Summit, and any peace declaration, should be judged by the extent to which it concretely advances the denuclearization of North Korea.

In the process, U.S. deployments on the Peninsula and in East Asia should not be addressed in a multilateral context. Presence issues are between the U.S. and our alliance partners. Clearly, if diplomacy succeeds in achieving denuclearization and threat reduction, Washington and Seoul can adjust the U.S. presence to reflect the eased security environment, thereby assuaging North Korea's security concerns.

The number and complexity of issues to be addressed by the Six Party Working Groups will rule out uniform progress across the board; it will also invite Pyongyang to look for points of leverage to drive wedges among the U.S., the ROK, and Japan. This is evidenced in its efforts to marginalize and isolate Japan over the abductee issue and must be resisted.

Finally, whatever structures evolve out of the six-party process, the strength of the U.S. position in Northeast Asia will continue to rest on the alliances with the ROK and Japan. The search for peace regimes and peace mechanisms should not put them at risk. The alliances are irreplaceable.

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