

Feasibility of Regional Security Framework in Northeast Asia

Cho Kyung Hwan (Sejong Institute)

1. Cliched Questions

Why have the key actors in Northeast Asia consisting of the U.S., Japan, China, Russia, and the two Koreas yet to develop a regional security framework? Does the region have a potential to create an institutionalized framework?

2. The End State of ‘Destined for war’ and ‘Unnecessary war’

Two different wars confronting the region are presumably the most important variables. One is a ‘destined for war’(Allison, 2017)¹ and the other is the possibility of another type of an ‘unnecessary war’ (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2003)².

Drawing upon the consensus that the U.S. is still the only global superpower, yet if there is a state that will challenge it as a global competitor, it is China. It is not an overestimation to say that U.S.-China relations will shape the regional character. If U.S.-China relations become beset with geographical conflict, arms race, and zero-sum rivalry, the peace and stability of the region will be in jeopardy. But if they succeed in finding a happy medium to recognize their differences and to cooperate in the economic, political, and security arenas, the prospects for peace and stability in

¹ Graham Allison looks into the future of US-China relations in *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* Specifically based on Thucydides's observation that it was the rise of Athens and the fear in Sparta that made war inevitable, Allison has popularized the phrase ‘Thucydides's Trap’ to describe the dangerous historical dynamic that develops when a rising power threatens to displace an established ruling power.

² John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt in *An Unnecessary War* criticized the campaign to wage to war against Iraq for resting on a flimsy foundation and even if such a war went well it would still have been unnecessary a month before the war broke out.

Northeast Asia will be brightened (Ikenberry, 2011)³. Then how will the relationship unfold? The rise of China inevitably lead to a grand clash or China will seek to integrate into the U.S. led unipolar international order. Undoubtedly, economic interdependence, mutual vulnerabilities, norms, and institutions between the great two can shape and constraint conflicts. And China will continue to play a role as a responsible stakeholder and strategic reassurance in the region in the foreseeable future. But I don't think China has a choice since the prevailing global liberal order creates the settings for the rise of China and will continuously influence China's rise and of course its rise will impact the liberal international order and vice versa. Given the fact that U.S. engaged in two world wars and the Cold War in which they fought for ideology and international hegemony and stood victorious, the U.S. will go tough as long as they fear the rise of China and feel China undermine the existing order irrespective of whether China has ideas, capacities, or incentives to challenge the existing order and build a new one or not. In the end, geopolitical turbulence is inevitable during the power struggle in the region.

When it comes to an 'Unnecessary war', for the first time since the end of the Korean War in 1953, internal and external forces are converging on the Korean Peninsula with profound implications on the regional security and stability. First, while President Moon of South Korea tries to pursue political and economic integration between the two Koreas which could result in dramatic changes in the region; U.S. President Donald Trump still supposedly trusts Kim Jong Un's will to denuclearize even after leaving Hanoi empty-handed and the series of SRBM provocations in May, there is still a possible military option on the table in that Kim Jong Un won't easily give up the nuclear capability until he feels secured. And we have a lesson from Eastern Europe that the more repressive the regime, the more sudden the collapse considering the pressure accumulating within the North Korea regime. Second, regardless of Trump's willingness to make so-called a 'big deal' with North Korea,

³ in *The Rise of China, the United States, and the future of the Liberal International Order*.

U.S. strategic leverage on the region is diminishing as opposed to the rapid rise of China’s power. Furthermore the new geographical balance of power and a transitional security environment in the region require the current robust Korea–U.S. alliance rethink the value, the object, and the level of it. Now I agree with the idea that it is time to move away from scenario-based planning to stability-based multiple responses cutting across political, military, and economic domains (Lee & Botto, 2019)⁴.

3. Key actors’ perception and interests toward multilateral security regime

actors	perception	interests
The U.S.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - prefer bilateral alliance - need to make a coordinated approach to resolve regional issues including North Korea nuclear issue in a multilateral framework as a complementing mechanism - actively engaged in Indo-Pacific Strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - useful strategy toward regional issues - tool for engagement policy - have China and Russia abide by the international sanction against North Korea
China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - platform for China-Bashing - reduce regional suspicion over China’s hegemony - deter Japan’s military build up - lessen U.S. military deployment and possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - contribute to sustainable China’s economic growth - a forum for enhancing China’s defense strategy - better room to join North Korea denuclearization process as a stakeholder

⁴ Chung Min, Lee & Kathryn Botto.(2019). *Reconceptualization U.S.-ROK Cooperation in Korean Unification: A Stabilization Framework*. Carnegie Endowment.

	intervention in the region	
Japan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - concerned about the possible harm to U.S.-Japan alliance - dilute negative perception to strengthen its security role in the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - contain China's emergence as a military superpower - contribute to the non-proliferation of WMD - increase security role in the region
Russia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strongest advocate - create an favorable environment for the economy especially - useful tool for actualize Putin's foreign policy toward East Asia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - help Russia to reduce defense expenditure - interested in being free from Japanese threat - influence North Korea denuclearization process
South Korea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consistent preference for multilateral security regime on the basis of ROK-U.S. alliance - utilize geo-strategic importance to reduce tension on the Peninsula - form a favorable environment to turn the armistice to a peace regime 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - induce North Korea to become a regional responsible member - contribute to the Korean unification

<p>North Korea</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - force to seek security cooperation - prevent isolation by collective pressures - leeway to survive international sanctions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - contribute to resolving economic hardship - help maintain the regime - better win-set to make a deal with the U.S. - seek security assurance, sanction relief, and diplomatic recognition
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source: Kyung Yung, Chung(2005). Building a Military Security Cooperation Regime in North East Asia: Feasibility and Design (Dissertation: University of Maryland)

Historically while South Korea, Japan and Russia are in favor of a multilateral security regime in Northeast Asia, the United States, China and North Korea have less enthusiasm over the idea. However, recently the U.S. and China have rationale and necessity of multilateral security cooperation from their experiences especially with North Korea issues in common.

And in the short run, widely divergent priorities among the regional actors regarding negotiations on the Korean Peninsula will complicate or even undermine ROK and U.S. strategy and end up with creating a chasm that China is willing to exploit. Thus the U.S. should actively begin multilateral conversations with North Korea, ROK and China, and later on with Japan and Russia on a peace regime for the Korean Peninsula. More dynamic multilateral security cooperation activities are required to actually form a security regime in light of whether to deal effectively with regional and transnational issues or to complement and facilitate the existing order.

4. Who Takes the Lead

o Two Koreas

* Panmunjom Declaration (April 27, 2018) : President Moon and North Korea leader Kim Jong Un agreed to declare that South and North Korea will actively cooperate to establish a permanent and solid peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.

* Kim Jong Un's 2019 New Year Address: He resolved to begin the process for establishing a peace regime via multilateral negotiations.

o 3 parties consisting of two Koreas and U.S. or 4 parties comprised of two Koreas and principal allies during the war, the U.S. and China

* U.S.-D.P.R.K. Joint Communiqué (October 12, 2000): the two sides agreed there are a variety of available means, including Four Party talks, to reduce tension on the Korean Peninsula and formally end the Korean War by replacing the 1953 Armistice Agreement with permanent peace arrangements.

* Panmunjom Declaration: South and North Korea agreed to actively pursue trilateral meetings involving the two Koreas and the United States, or quadrilateral meetings involving the two Koreas, the United States, and China with a view to declaring an end to the War, turning the armistice into a peace treaty, and establishing a permanent and solid peace regime.

* Joint Statement of President Donald Trump and Chairman Kim Jong Un at the Singapore Summit (June 12, 2018): join their efforts to build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.

o U.S.-ROK Co-leadership

* U.S. President Bill Clinton and President Kim Young Sam of South Korea proposed the Four Party talks in April 1996 as a way of overcoming North Korea's unwillingness to negotiate directly with the South. Then the North had long sought talks only with the U.S.

o 「ROK-U.S.-Japan's trilateral military cooperation」 approach

o 「ROK-China-Japan's trilateral summit talk」 approach

* It began as a side meeting within the ASEAN+3 summit in 1999 and developed a body of trilateral summit talk in 2008 to hold the summit meeting in turn. In 2010 they agreed to establish a trilateral secretariat in Seoul and in 2018 adopted a joint statement to make efforts to contribute to resolving comprehensively their concerns for the purpose of regional peace and security.

o 「ROK-U.S.-China's strategic dialogue」 approach

* Utilize 「Seoul Defense Dialogue(SDD)」 which ROK has held as an annual vice minister-level regional security meeting since 2002.

o Six-party talks approach

* Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of Six-Party Talks (September 19, 2005): The Six parties committed to joint efforts for lasting peace and stability in northeast Asia. The directly related parties will negotiate a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula at an appropriate separate forum. The six parties agreed to explore ways and means for promoting security cooperation in Northeast Asia.

* North Korea and Russia summit talk (April 25, 2019): Vladimir Putin mentioned six-party talks as a way to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue in the summit talks even though 3 days later White House National Security Advisor John Bolton retorted that six-party talks are not the U.S. preferred method to deal with it explaining that Six-Party Talks approach had failed in the past but added that “that does not mean we don't consult” other countries.

5. A Proposal for Northeast Asia security regime

Given the many interests at stake, starting the conversation early to have a common

understanding and work toward a consensus in advance of formal discussions will be helpful to reach a sustainable outcome. Once the regional actors identify there is a broad consensus among them that a multilateral security cooperation arrangement needs to be institutionalized whether to complement the existing security order or to create a new one, the arrangement should focus on establishing a framework for reconciliation, peace, stability and co-prosperity by implementing feasible options relating to security issues.

In order to do that, first, they should identify issues relating to regional security cooperation. Secondly, they need to make sure how to proceed in developing the regional security cooperation and lastly, how to define the relations between the actual improvement of mutual cooperation and the institutionalization of norms.

The security cooperation needs to be implemented gradually taking the feasibility and the impact into considerations. The first step will be creating a favorable environment followed by steps of enlarging the realistic cooperation to accomplish institutionalization.

This idea could be realized by way of holding a regional summit talk first to discuss security issues in the region. Annual summit talks need to be established to provide guidance and policies related to resolving transnational security issues. (the end).