

Towards North East Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone——How do we move forward from Peace in Korean Peninsula to North East Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone for regional peace and security?

Presentation Outline (subject to update)

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NEANWFZ and the Norm of Nonproliferation

A major element of the NEANWFZ is the joint commitment to the principle and norm of nuclear nonproliferation. Regardless of what process can be achieved over DPRK's denuclearization for the foreseeable future, all regional countries' explicit commitment to nonproliferation should be strengthened.

DPRK's official commitment to the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons and their delivery vehicles, sensitive nuclear and missile technologies, materials, and knowhow constitutes a key part of the basis for any future diplomatic engagement between DPRK and other international players. It is also important for DPRK to substantiate its nonproliferation commitment by taking measures such as: setting up domestic law and regulatory systems to align its export control standard and practice with that of the international community; following the principles and control lists of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), and the Australia Group, etc.; accepting training from international partners and providing training to its own officials and experts on best practice and gold standard; and providing a high degree of transparency over its export control system and accepting necessary international monitoring and verification.

Explicit commitment by Japan and ROK to the nonproliferation principle and norm is also increasingly important as domestic voices in these countries for developing indigenous military nuclear capabilities might grow if the complete denuclearization of DPRK could not be achieved in the near- to mid-term future. These countries can not only help facilitate the denuclearization negotiation but also help reassure the international community of their nonproliferation commitment by imposing clearer and stricter domestic legal constraint on developing military nuclear capabilities and by promoting domestic public education campaigns on the dangers of nuclear proliferation.

NEANWFZ and Joint Commitment to Nuclear Risk Reduction

Joint commitment by all regional countries to nuclear risk reduction would help prepare the ground for the eventual achievement of NEANWFZ and help effectively reduce the risk of nuclear war before NEANWFZ's realization.

Efforts of nuclear risk reduction can take the following forms:

All nuclear armed countries are encouraged to make unilateral, bilateral, and/or multilateral commitments to unconditional No First Use of nuclear weapons (not be the first to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons under any conditions, at any time.)

Existing nuclear weapons states (NWS) the United States, Russia, and China should make immediate efforts to engage DPRK on building shared understanding on risks of inadvertent nuclear escalation. Engagement efforts can take the form of dialogues, exchanges, workshops, seminars, visiting scholarships, and joint trainings, etc. The goal for such engagement is to help DPRK policy-makers and experts develop sophisticated understandings about the limited role of nuclear weapons, the risks of destabilizing nuclear postures such as pre-delegating nuclear launch authority to low-level military officers and keeping nuclear weapons on high alert, the complexity of nuclear signaling during the fog of war and dangers of misunderstanding and misjudgment leading to inadvertent escalation, etc.

Nonnuclear weapons states (NNWS) such as Japan and ROK should also engage with DPRK in dialogues on how to prevent misunderstanding and misjudgment over mobilization of conventional forces during a conventional military crisis from causing inadvertent escalation.

NEANWFZ and the Transformation of DPRK

The realization of NEANWFZ requires mitigating the mutual threat perception between some of the main rival states, especially reducing the mutual threat perception between DPRK and the United States. For DPRK, it is a deeply paranoid country and its threat perception toward the United States is a result of deep bias and serious misunderstanding of the U.S. strategic intentions and security policies. This serious misunderstanding, to a large extent, is caused by decades-long isolation of DPRK from the international community and the outside world, making it unable to develop balanced and nuanced understandings about the liberal international order and norm, of which the United States is a major representative and an important guardian. Therefore, to fundamentally address DPRK's deep fear and paranoia requires gradually bringing the country back to the international community and helping the country open up, be exposed, learn, and adapt.

In other words, a major part of building peace in Northeast Asia is about to gradually transform DPRK into a normal country and society and to change its mindset in the long run. Building a new peace regime is not only about just putting in place some artificial security structure or regional organizations/institutions. Instead, a more fundamental goal of peace building should be aiming at gradually changing the mindset, which won't automatically happen simply because of a new security structure or a new regional security organization.

To achieve of goal of ultimately transforming and reintegrating DPRK into the international community as a normal member, comprehensive engagement should aim at breaking the country's isolation and promoting information, thinking, and people to people exchange at all levels. For that matter, it should be recognized that maintaining maximum pressure and comprehensive economic embargos against DPRK works against this long-term and more fundamental goal, as it reinforces DPRK's isolation, and subsequently paranoia. If full sanction relief could not be achieved anytime soon because DPRK is only willing to make limited concessions on its nuclear and missile programs, then partial sanction relief could be designed to most effectively facilitate the goal of DPRK liberalization and transformation.

NEANWFZ and the Mitigation of Big Power Competition

The intensification of big power competition and rivalry between the United States and Russia, and more importantly between the United States and China, creates unprecedented challenges for regional stability. If left unaddressed, the deepening U.S.-China strategic rivalry could become the dominant force, shaping future regional security landscape. The U.S. concern toward China could dwarf its concern about DPRK and the increasingly competitive US-China geopolitical interests in this region could considerably hinder their potential cooperation to achieve DPRK denuclearization and the NEANWFZ. At the same time, DPRK would seek to take advantage of the growing big power competition.

If the goal of establishing a peace regime in the region is set to include settling the U.S.-China and U.S.-Russia strategic competition, that seems overly ambitious. Instead, a more realistic goals seems to be limited to managing and mitigating the big power competitions, in addition to working on DPRK's denuclearization.

A joint effort by all regional players can make an important contribution to managing and mitigating the big power competitions. Within the framework of NEANWFZ, bilateral and multilateral dialogues, as well as joint working groups, to tackle difficult technical and policy disagreements on issues related to missile defense deployment and the possible development and deployment of advanced medium-range and intermediate-range land-based missiles in some of the regional countries after the demise of the INF treaty, should start to build common understandings and avoid worse-

case scenario thinking. These efforts would become increasingly imperative to contain the hostility between DPRK and its rivals and to prevent a new strategic fault line between the United States, Japan, and ROK on one side and China, Russia, and DPRK on the opposite side from taking shape.