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A Conundrum and the 'Seventh Party': Envisioning Peace and Security in Northeast Asia 一つの難題と「第七派」―北東アジアにおける平和と安全を思い描く

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Between 2012 and 2014 we posted a number of articles on contemporary affairs without giving them volume and issue numbers or dates. Often the date can be determined from internal evidence in the article, but sometimes not. We have decided retrospectively to list all of them as Volume 12 Number 30 with a date of 2012 with the understanding that all were published between 2012 and 2014.

Paik Nak-chung

Just one week before the recent North Korean announcement of a forthcoming satellite launch, which was met by a chorus of denunciation around the world, a non-governmental "Six Party" conference gathered on March 7 to 9 at Millennium UN Plaza Hotel, New York City, under the name of the 2012 New York Conference on Peace and Cooperation in Northeast Asia. Its co-sponsors were the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the Maxwell School of Syracuse University, the Center for Peace and Public Integrity at Hanshin University, the National Association of Korean Americans, and the Pacific Century Institute.

The following article is a slightly revised version of a paper prepared for the opening Session of the conference devoted to a presentation by one speaker each from the participating countries (US, South Korea, Japan, Russia, China, and North Korea). Professor Paik here adds a postscript, dated March 28, on the significance of the New York meeting in light of subsequent

events.

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It is a rare privilege to present 'a vision statement' along with speakers from other Six-Party Talks countries. I hasten to add, however, that I have neither the authority nor competence, nor indeed the inclination, to speak for the government of the Republic of Korea. Instead, I shall try to speak for like-minded people in the civilian sector of my country, while staking out a claim not fully shared even among those people. For I believe South Korea's civil society constitutes, or at least is in the process of constituting itself, as the (uninvited) 'seventh party' in the Six-Party Talks. I shall come back later and explain what I mean.

The Korean Peninsula occupies a pivotal place in Northeast Asia not only geographically but also in the geopolitical dimension of regional peace and security. The existence of Six-Party Talks with its focus on "peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula" (in the words of the September 19 Joint Statement of 2005) bears witness to this fact. The immediate focus of the Talks is on denuclearization of the Peninsula, but ever since the first North Korean nuclear crisis of 1994 it has become increasingly evident that the problem of North Korea's nuclear armament cannot be resolved in isolation from numerous related issues. The 2005 Joint Statement finally turned this recognition into an officially shared perception—or at least into an officially agreed verbal expression.

True, there are other important documents: bilateral high-level agreements between the DPRK and the United States (October 2000) and between the DPRK and Japan (September 2002), not to mention the June 15 Joint Declaration of 2000 and the October 4 Summit Declaration of 2007 between the two Koreas. But as the first *multilateral* accord regarding peace, cooperation and security of the region, and more far-reaching than anything since then, the September 19 Joint Statement remains the grounding document for any future efforts. Both its stated goals of denuclearization, normalized diplomatic relations, economic cooperation, and a permanent peace regime in Korea, (articles 1-4), and its prescribed method of implementing "in a phased manner in line with the principle of 'commitment for commitment, action for action'" (article 5) have set down the guidelines for any future scheme of the region's peace and security.

But in one crucial respect it has become outdated: North Korea since that time has conducted nuclear tests (in 2006 and again in 2009) and acquired a nuclear arsenal, a development which the Joint Statement had been intended to *forestall*. This has made the problem much more complicated and difficult to resolve, not least by creating so much distrust and bad blood among the concerned parties. But then, one may reflect that the problem in all likelihood was always a good deal more complex than any of the six parties ever realized.

Take the nuclear issue. The September 2005 agreement would provide North Korea, in return for its denuclearization, normalization of DPRK-US and DPRK-Japan relations, a peace treaty (through negotiations among the four directly related parties) to replace the 1953 Armistice regime, and a greatly expanded economic and energy assistance and cooperation. It is doubtful, however, that Pyongyang's paramount concern for its security would be satisfied by these measures, for, unlike China and Vietnam when they embarked on the course of 'reform and opening', North Korea would still be faced with the threat of the presence of a far wealthier South, a presence that could become all the more threatening and even destabilizing in a period of expanded contact and collaboration. On the other hand, neither diplomatic normalization nor substantial economic assistance would be forthcoming without progress toward abolition of those very nuclear weapons that are expressions of North Korea's sense of insecurity. So here we have a veritable vicious circle—or at least a very vexing conundrum.

This is not to say that we should throw up our hands and resign ourselves to the status quo, hoping (against hope) that somehow things will not get worse over time, that Pyongyang, too, will accept a status quo that is already intolerable enough to them. If the rest of us

find it a little less so at the moment, they will surely do everything to shake our complacency. We thus have no choice except to start again with the agreements we already have, proceeding "in a phased manner in line with the principle of 'commitment for commitment, action for action'," but also keeping the big picture in sight and searching for a more innovative resolution of the conundrum.

As a matter of fact, a highly innovative formula for inter-Korean relations was discovered and agreed upon in the 2000 summit meeting of Kim Dae-Jung and Kim Jong Il. Article 2 of the June 15 Joint Declaration called for a *phased* reunification process with its first stage closer to a confederation than to a federation, (as virtually acknowledged by Pyongyang when it used the phrase 'low-stage federation' as an alternative to the South's proposal of a confederation or, to be more exact, a union of states). I happen to believe that for the moment it is more realistic to work toward a 'low-stage confederation'—a union or association in many respects looser than the European Union. Even such a loose bonding would have to depend on substantial progress in the agendas of the September 19 Joint Statement. Once such conditions are met, however, and even a loose union or association comes into being, it will represent, in the peculiar historical context of the Korean Peninsula, an irreversible step toward eventual reunification as well as a maximum possible guarantee for the security of the Pyongyang regime and the stability of inter-Korean economic cooperation. At any rate, the point to stress in connection with regional peace and security is that progress in the international agendas of September 19 Joint Statement depends in turn on progress in the construction of such an inter-Korean institutional framework.

One crucial byproduct of Article 2 may not have been intended by the two leaders. The commitment to a gradual, step-by-step reunification opened up, as in none of the precedent-setting instances of one-shot unification in Vietnam, Germany, or Yemen, the space for participation by ordinary citizens in the process; and at least in South Korea, civil society is sure to enter and appropriate to its use whatever space becomes available. It will do so not only through direct participation in North-South exchanges, but more importantly by means of democratic impact on government policy, including, if necessary, domestic 'regime change' by recourse to the vote. Therefore, I have called South Korea's civil sector (in the wider sense of including business enterprises) 'the third party' in inter-Korean relations.[1] As yet its actual role may not quite match the name, but given that 'reunification Korean-style' is a long drawn-out, open-ended process, its role is bound to increase. Moreover, so long as South Korean democracy retains its vigor, 'the third party', having no fixed term of office, will work as a steadying force amidst the shifting policies of elected governments.

The term 'seventh party' is an extension of this idea to the arena of six-party negotiations. Now, if the claim to being 'the third party' in inter-Korean relations seems somewhat far-fetched, how much more so must sound this notion of a 'seventh party' on the international stage. But the simple fact is that none of the four great powers involved, nor Pyongyang nor Seoul either, seems able to solve the famous conundrum when left to themselves. Not one of the six parties pays much attention to the idea of North-South union or confederation: not the four powers because they consider it none of their business, (except that it *is*); not North Korea because at the moment they are too preoccupied with immediate survival; and not the Seoul government—which ought to know better, since a union with the North offers no

threat to South Korea's democracy or capitalist economy—because it looks askance at any talk of national reconciliation as a politically motivated attack on its 'principled' hard-line stance toward the North. But I submit that once serious efforts for peace and security in Northeast Asia are resumed, sheer horse sense and political realism will come to recognize that the region-wide goals, including the burning issue of denuclearization, will *not* be achieved *unless* accompanied by a conscious move toward some (loose) political alignment of the two Koreas.

Needless to say, I do not mean to limit to seven the number of concerned parties in the task of building a peaceful and secure Northeast Asia. At the state level, Mongolia for one will have to come in when the Six-Party Talks have achieved their initial goals and may choose to evolve into a more comprehensive regional framework (say, after the model of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe); and the European Union, either collectively or at the level of individual member states, could play a positive role without formally participating in the Talks. At the level of civil society, too, South Korea obviously will not claim any monopoly of input. The United States and Japan among Six-Party Talks countries are certainly rich in civic movements and independent NGOs. But we cannot expect civil society as a whole in those countries to be sufficiently focused on Korea to qualify as a full-fledged 'party'. As far as the Korean Peninsula, or indeed Northeast Asia, is concerned, much will depend on the initiatives of the 'seventh party' to foster keener interest in, and more effective participation by, citizens of related countries. Both a Korean and Northeast Asian peace and cooperation framework will require in any case greatly expanded 'bottom-up' endeavors, including 'track 2' and 'track 1.5' activities.

If we move beyond security concerns, the wider *East* Asia rather than *North*east Asia will present itself as the area of regional cooperation. Here the EU model of state-level integration can hardly apply, if only because of the preponderant size and demographic weight of China. The role of civil societies, though at present far more limited than in Europe, will eventually come to play a qualitatively different role insofar as East Asian regional solidarity, if it materializes at all, will take a less sovereignty-oriented form and rely more on civilian exchanges, economic collaboration, and networking among specific localities. To be sure, the role of governments will remain important, and state-level associations—including the already functioning Association of Southeast Asian states (ASEAN)—should be encouraged where relevant. But I have no time to go into this subject, which in my view is closely connected with the theme of peace and security in Northeast Asia.

Afterword (March 28, 2012)

The actual focus of attention at the 2012 New York Conference was (to no one's surprise) not so much on 'the seventh party' but the exchanges between the two major parties most concerned with North Korea's nuclear program, namely, the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or North Korea) and the United States. The discussion reached a high point at a Special Session attended by John Kerry, Chairman of the U. S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The whole conference was run under the Chatham House Rules, allowing public

accounts of discussions but without attribution to individual speakers. This inevitably constrains free reflection on the conversations that took place concerning the nuclear issue, but I would like nevertheless to offer some thoughts on the subject, for the issue came to capture public attention with the DPRK's announcement (almost immediately after the conference ended) that it would launch a satellite to commemorate next month's hundredth birthday of the country's founding leader, the late Kim Il Sung.

One of the more impressive and (to most participants) gratifying aspects of the conference was the North Korean delegation's forthcoming attitude toward resolving outstanding issues between DPRK and the U.S, despite their reiterated insistence on the paramount importance of ceasing the hostile U.S. policy toward DPRK as the surest course for resolving the nuclear issue. The U.S. position, as is well known, is that US-DPRK rapprochement will be impossible without some tangible move toward denuclearization on the North Korean side. Yet both sides at the conference seemed genuinely eager to find a meeting point, the direction to which, in my view, was already set by the September 19 Joint Statement's principle of "commitment for commitment, action for action." In any case, there was a clear message from Pyongyang (and I reproduce the wording from memory but without individual attribution), "Our new leadership intends not to fight the United States any more, unlike past generations." It was followed by the assurance that DPRK will faithfully implement the February 29 bilateral agreements, (U.S. nutrition aid and a DPRK moratorium on long-range missile launches and the uranium enrichment program.)

The subsequent announcement of a satellite launch would in any case have invited charges that it was "a deal breaker" (U.S. State Department spokeswoman) and violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1874 prohibiting North Korea from further missile technology tests. To participants of the New York Conference the contrast between the gathering's hopeful atmosphere and the newly heightened tension (including increased perception of DPRK untrustworthiness) could only be the more glaring and enigmatic.

However, as further facts (or reported facts) surfaced, it becomes increasingly dubious whose position, that of the U.S. or the DPRK, is the more enigmatic. Pyongyang insists not only that the satellite launch is one thing and the agreement to freeze long-range missile tests another, but that they informed the U.S. of their intention at the *second* round of bilateral talks, i.e., before the death of Kim Jong Il in November 2011, as well as at the third round in February 2012. The DPRK also has invited International Atomic Energy Association inspectors to return to monitor the uranium enrichment facilities. In response, the U.S. continues to accuse Pyongyang of violating both the UN resolution and the latest bilateral accord, but it has welcomed the return of IAEA inspectors, i.e., without (thus far) abrogating the accord itself, indicating only that it will not provide the food aid under the present circumstances.

In the light of these developments the New York Conference probably was enacting a more intriguing drama than most participants realized. For, although this can be no more than a conjecture, those in high positions in Washington and Pyongyang, at least Senator Kerry and Vice Foreign Minister Ri Yongho, must have conducted the discussion with knowledge of the planned satellite launch. It is another conjecture of mine that Pyongyang will go on with its plan. How and when, if at all, the

two governments then rearrange their priorities to move forward again in line with the principle of "commitment for commitment, action for action" remains to be seen.

Footnotes

[1] See Paik Nak-chung, *The Division System in Crisis: Essays on Contemporary Korea* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), Chapter 11 'Korean-Style Reunification and Civic Participation: South Korea's Civil Society as the "Third Party" on the Korean Peninsula'.

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