

# Towards a Northeast Asia Security Community: Implications for Korea's Growth and Economic Development

## From a Fault Line to a Catalyst: An Emerging Korean Confederation and the Contour of a Northeast Asian Security Community

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We have much ado about various scenarios of forming a regional community in East Asia. So far, many ideas and initiatives have been centered on establishing a regional community bringing together the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its three Northeast Asian partners—China, Japan, and South Korea.<sup>1</sup> The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) has also been in operation as a regional security dialogue with the participation of 27 countries interested in the promotion of security in East Asia. Does the ARF have any potential for evolving into a regional security alliance, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)? Why does the idea of forming a security community appear controversial in East Asia, especially in Northeast Asia?

Clearly, one of the stumbling blocks is the presence of the lingering Cold War-like security landscape in Northeast Asia, represented by the two divided states of China and Korea.<sup>2</sup> The Korean divide, in particular, described as a major fault line partitioning Northeast Asia into two blocs, has been the locus of attention at the turn of the twenty-first century because of North Korea's development of nuclear and missile programs and the protracted issue of regime survival. Though rare in Northeast Asia's security landscape, two ad hoc multinational talks—four-party talks (1997–98) and six-party talks (beginning in 2003 and ongoing)—have been convened to address a multitude of problems emanating from the Korean divide, highlighting a linkage between the Korean issues and regional security.

Economic integration is already in full swing among Northeast Asian countries after the end of the Cold War. In contrast, the change of the security landscape has been painstakingly slow. South Korea's diplomatic normalization with the Soviet Union in 1990 and with China in 1992 did not lead to North Korea's rapprochement with the United States and Japan. As evidence of the lingering Cold War structure, Japan has been closely aligned with the United States, while

China has been a main political and economic backer of North Korea. South Korea's future alliance politics appears precarious despite its current alliance with the United States, while North Korea and Mongolia have been only an ad hoc presence in regional dialogue.

As before, the region's two strongest states, China and Japan, have been stuck in a bipolar rivalry, jockeying for a better position in a regional leadership game. Here, national identities loom large. China, once called the "Middle Kingdom," does not identify itself simply as one of the Northeast Asian countries. Being the world's third-largest country in terms of territorial size after Russia and Canada, China ranks number two in the world in terms of its purchasing power parity-adjusted gross domestic product after only the United States.<sup>3</sup> Boosted by its population of 1.3 billion and robust growth potential, China has sought to ensure its "peaceful rise" with multiple engagements with different parts of the world. Because China played a main role in organizing the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to address interstate issues, such as conflicts over shared borders, with a group of countries located north and west of it, China is likely to seek to create a similar security mechanism in Northeast Asia.

Like China, Japan does not want to nurture its identity purely as one of the Northeast Asian states. Being the world's number two economic power, Japan once aspired to change its identity from that of an East Asian country to one of the West despite its geographical placement in Northeast Asia.<sup>4</sup> As evidence that it has recovered from a decade-long recession at the end of the twentieth century, Japan returned to the world financial stage in 2008 by taking over parts of major U.S. financial institutions, such as Morgan Stanley and Lehman Brothers. The U.S. financial troubles, sparked by the subprime mortgage crisis, showed that Japan's major financial institutions are equipped with expertise as well as purchasing power, far ahead of such fast-growing economies as China and India.<sup>5</sup> All in all, the identity dynamic of China and Ja-

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pan has given them a sense of exceptionality, making it hard for them to cooperate to build a regional community.

This paper sheds light on a scenario in which this bipolar rivalry could evolve into a dynamic three-way system of competition and cooperation in parallel with the emergence of a Korean confederation.<sup>6</sup> This scenario is based on the belief that it would be virtually impossible to enter into any genuine dialogue to form a regional security community in Northeast Asia as long as North Korea persists as a state posing threats to its neighbors.<sup>7</sup> In the process of forming a community in Europe or North America, there has been no state that considers one or more states in the prospective bloc as an enemy. Beyond this security dimension, North Korea's international isolation has created gridlock hampering transportation and traffic between the continental and maritime countries in Northeast Asia. This gridlock has brought about far-reaching economic woes not only to ordinary North Koreans but also to those in the northeastern provinces of China, who have been denied opportunities of growth comparable with the other economically bustling parts of China.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the transformation of North Korea into an open society will be a blessing to the Northeast Asian countries, facilitating multilevel exchange and cooperation.

Initially, the emergence of a Korean confederation will touch off a further nationalist or integrationist movement affecting Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture in northeastern China and Mongolia beyond it, given that their ethnic, cultural, and linguistic affinity could facilitate interactions on various levels.<sup>9</sup> Surely this development will irritate the Chinese government and provoke Chinese nationalism, raising political tension in the short term. A series of history projects sponsored by the Chinese government has already provoked nationalist uproars in South Korea and Mongolia because the series aimed to give a revisionist look to the history of China and its neighboring countries by incorporating the ancient history of the neighboring countries as part of China's. Cyberspace in China and South Korea has been abuzz with the accusations of each other's alleged nationalist or imperialist ambitions, occasionally spilling into bilateral diplomatic negotiations. However, the efforts to address these long overdue issues between the concerned countries will become a golden chance to make reality checks on the boundaries of nationalism and to foster ways of establishing a security regime to tackle various interstate issues as a prelude to the formation of a security community. So far these bilateral negotiations and regional integrationist moves have been overshadowed by hard security issues emanating from Cold War-style political tension such as the North Korean nuclear crisis.

In this article, I am optimistic about two possibilities: the formation of a Korean confederation and the positive role

of such a confederation in the creation of a Northeast Asian security community. My arguments sound teleological, but teleology returned to the discipline of international politics with, for instance, Alexander Wendt arguing strongly in favor of the establishment of a world state as the final stage of various political projects of the human civilization.<sup>10</sup> Teleology often marries history, which is a story of humans, and their groupings, which are not just the agents of material power but the incarnation of ideas and discourses. Although it is one of the weakest Northeast Asian states, South Korea has been saturated recently with the idea of the so-called greater Korea, with its film and drama industry increasingly featuring inter-Korean rapprochement and nostalgic renditions of once powerful Korean kingdoms that prospered in the territories of contemporary China and Russia more than 1,000 years ago; in a form of irredentism, these are often described as "old lands" or "lost lands." The process of forming a Northeast Asian security community will gain momentum when China and a future Korean confederation institutionalize their contacts to find a political solution to many pending issues, including this one, and Japan, regarded as a regional "intermediary" for U.S. hegemony, is convinced it is time to deeply engage with these two historical rivals.<sup>11</sup>

Given the identities and pending issues affecting the Northeast Asian countries, an emerging security regime in Northeast Asia will be designed to address primarily intraregional challenges, such as territorial and history issues and accompanying nationalist fervor, rather than becoming a form of multilateral alliance to counter external threats.<sup>12</sup> This is because the states in Northeast Asia need to alleviate the negative side of nationalism and control an arms race in parallel with the formation of a Korean confederation and the readjustment of U.S. security commitments in Northeast Asia. It appears inevitable for the United States to review its "over-stretched military commitments" in the wake of its unprecedented financial crisis affecting its global status, with mounting predictions of hegemonic transition.<sup>13</sup> In the face of these external and internal challenges, as well as out of their desire to maintain economic prosperity and unhampered cultural exchange, I argue that the Northeast Asian countries would have no option but to create a regional security regime with an Asian face, similar to the SCO, rather than an organization similar to NATO or the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The SCO is a multinational security organization under the twin leadership of China and Russia, but its refusal to grant the United States observer status touched off the suspicion that it might be an anti-Western alliance. A Northeast Asian version of the SCO would likely take more equal and open approaches to its members and the outside powers, such as the United States and Russia, because Japan and South Korea, regarded as pro-Western countries, would work to

harmonize both Asian and Western values in the process of institutionalizing decision-making processes.

The formation of a security regime in this region is likely to result from the successful confluence of the six-party talks and some regional integrationist initiatives, such as the three-way summit talks among China, Japan, and South Korea, under way since 1999.<sup>14</sup> Already it is a norm that the leaders of the three countries hold a meeting of their own, separate from the ASEAN process. Therefore, what is needed to create a security regime as a basis for a future community are efforts to institutionalize these fledgling contacts by establishing principles, rules, and decision-making processes.<sup>15</sup> As a name for this future security entity, I propose the Pyongyang Cooperation Organization because the establishment of a security organization in Northeast Asia will mark the dramatic transition of Pyongyang from the capital of a problem state to the Brussels of Northeast Asia. In sum, this paper will highlight a process in which the current intraregional balance-of-power system in Northeast Asia would evolve into a “cooperative security regime” via the formation of a Korean confederation.<sup>16</sup> This paper will first illustrate the current debate on forming a Northeast Asian security community. Second, it will explore the notion of a Korean confederation in the making. Third, it will elaborate on the role of a Korean confederation in creating a Northeast Asian security community.

### **Why a Northeast Asian Security Community?**

Northeast Asia is arguably one of the most rapidly transforming regions in the world because of China’s rise as an economic and political power, Japan’s transformation from a “peace state” to a “normal state,” and the possibility of Korean unity. Depending on the use of different yardsticks to measure the continuity and change of the region in flux, many commentators have diametrically different ideas on the characteristics of the region. Tsuneo Akaha, for example, dismisses as groundless the idea of calling Northeast Asia a region because it is not only devoid of regional institutions and transnational actors but saturated with interstate rivalries, historical grudges, and divided states.<sup>17</sup> Earlier, Aaron Friedberg argued that East Asia is “ripe for rivalry” with a potential of leading to great-power conflicts.<sup>18</sup> Despite these warnings, the region has enjoyed peace and security, as well as economic prosperity, in an unstable post-Cold War world.<sup>19</sup> Could this level of peace and security and the burgeoning economic ties among Northeast Asian countries be sufficient as a foundation for the creation of a regional security community?

Perhaps Northeast Asia might not need an organization like NATO, which was created in 1949 to counter an external enemy, the Soviet bloc. In particular, Japan is against such

an idea because of its current alliance with the United States and internal restrictions imposed by the so-called peace constitution.<sup>20</sup> However, the sheer absence of a security framework has already become one of the most notable security challenges to the region because it cannot be ruled out that the mistrust of one another’s intentions could snowball into a political crisis and an armed conflict.

What are the main problems putting the region’s security at stake? First, in the region there are two divided states that do not renounce the use of military forces at times of contingencies. Partly because of the potentialities of unification wars, South Korea and Taiwan are heavily dependent on U.S. security guarantees. Second, the bilateral military alliances of the United States with Japan and South Korea divide the region into two blocs: those that have and those that don’t have U.S. bases. This poses another challenge to the discussion of a Northeast Asian security community. Depending on the transformation of North Korea and rapprochement between China and Taiwan, the United States will face internal and external pressures for a substantial withdrawal of forces and a change in the missions of its basing.<sup>21</sup> At this juncture, the United States needs to play a constructive role to dispel some concerns that the sole superpower, which has to accept its weakening presence in this region, would become an “impediment” rather than a “facilitator” to regional security cooperation.<sup>22</sup> Third, the Cold War grievances as well as pre-Cold War ones are still intact, with diplomatic normalization talks between North Korea and the United States and between North Korea and Japan making no meaningful progress. Fourth, there are many cases of conflicting territorial claims among most of the countries in the region: the Northern Limit Line on the Yellow Sea between North and South Korea; Dokdo/Takeshima between South Korea and Japan; Senkaku/Diaoyu between Japan and China; and Kuril Islands/Northern Territories between Russia and Japan. Fifth, many cases of nationalist disputes accompany territorial claims and conflicting interpretations of both ancient and modern history. During the latter half of the twentieth century, the two Koreas and Japan sporadically clashed over how to interpret Japan’s colonial rule of the Korean peninsula. At the turn of the twenty-first century, China and South Korea entered into another round of disputes over the interpretation of ancient history, mainly covering the identity of old Korean empires that had thrived in the northeastern provinces of modern-day China more than 1,000 years ago.

With no solution in sight, many interstate issues, such as North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs and Japan’s justification of its imperialist history through the revision of textbooks, remained controversial, often hampering political dialogue. With the public debate becoming heated sporadically on history issues in China, Japan, and South

Korea, the governments of the concerned states found themselves in a delicate position, sometimes becoming the instigators of the nationalist clashes and at other times falling victim to them. Nevertheless, these centrifugal forces did not deal a blow to the growth of economic and cultural ties among these Northeast Asian countries. The volume of trade among China, Japan, and South Korea reached about \$400 billion in 2007, one-sixth of the total amount of trade of the three countries, effectively establishing one another as major trading partners.<sup>23</sup> In particular, China emerged the largest trading partner for both Japan and South Korea in 2007.<sup>24</sup> Second, cultural exchange is in full swing, with the popular culture of Japan and South Korea sweeping across the region and China emerging as a new force and major consumer in the entertainment sector.<sup>25</sup>

As part of efforts to sustain the economic and cultural ties, the concerned countries shared a need to create a regional security framework, as demonstrated by the establishment of a working group within the framework of the six-party talks to address the issue of a Northeast Asia peace and security mechanism. The six-party talks will become a long process of addressing various issues affecting Northeast Asian security as well as nuclear issues. Back in 1996, the United States and South Korea put forward the idea of organizing four-party talks with China and North Korea, with an aim of replacing the Korean armistice agreement with a peace treaty. Its first meeting was held in Geneva in December 1997 after several rounds of time-consuming preparatory sessions to build trust among the dialogue partners. Despite six rounds of talks, which lasted until June 1998, the four countries failed to make any meaningful progress because of the fundamental differences in their approaches toward security on the Korean peninsula. While the United States and South Korea sought a minimalist approach, such as tension reduction and confidence building, North Korea reiterated its traditional, maximalist demands that a peace treaty be signed between the United States and North Korea, excluding the South, and that U.S. troops be withdrawn from the South. Though billed as the first strategic dialogue between the United States and China to discuss a regional security issue,<sup>26</sup> the four-party talks were proven to be inappropriate for handling these issues because of the deeply entrenched security dilemmas on the Korean peninsula, the status of U.S. troops, and the format of dialogue, which excluded Russia and Japan.<sup>27</sup>

At present, the ARF is playing a role as a regional security dialogue, but the overblown membership makes it difficult to develop into a working framework of security. In a fresh initiative, which is unrelated to the ASEAN process, in 2007 China, Japan, and South Korea started to organize a trilateral foreign ministers' meeting with South Korea hosting its first meeting on Jeju Island in June. The three countries

also agreed in 2007 to organize a trilateral summit on a rotational basis. So far, these meetings have been held on the sidelines of other international forums such as ASEAN Plus Three. It is encouraging to see the three Northeast Asian countries embarking on dialogue among themselves, but still this fresh initiative has a long way to go before producing any tangible framework of security. Prior to the first three-way summit, the sudden resignation of Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda of Japan in September 2008 and political tension between Japan and South Korea over territorial and history issues clouded the feasibility of the initiative.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, this initiative is unlikely to produce a genuine security mechanism as long as North Korea and Mongolia are sidelined and the participating states shun the institutionalization of this process.

In addition to the membership issues of North Korea and Mongolia, it is difficult to predict how to accommodate the United States and Russia in this Northeast Asian security community.<sup>29</sup> Given the U.S. military presence; alliances with Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan; and the location of Russia's Far East as an integral part of this region, the two superpowers could claim a membership status. This membership issue would partially depend on how the current rounds of six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear programs would proceed to address the issues of a security mechanism in Northeast Asia and what kinds of constructive roles the United States and Russia can play to foster regional cooperation.

### **Rise of a Korean Confederation**

This section will present the concept of a Korean confederation, which would comprise the two Koreas aligned loosely or closely with other areas in Northeast Asia. The reason I am optimistic about the formation of a Korean confederation stems from the post-Cold War history, which has already witnessed gradual tension reduction and the introduction of joint business and tourist projects between the two Koreas.<sup>30</sup> At present, it is hard to discuss when Korean political elites might embrace this vision of a greater Korea and whether this highly risky idea is feasible in the face of China's objection. When he returned home just after a summit with North Korean chairman Kim Jong-il in June 2000, South Korea's president, Kim Dae-jung, hinted at this idea by introducing the vision of building an "Iron Silk Road" through which South Korea could reach Europe via North Korea, China, Mongolia, and Russia. President Kim's vision was based on the emergence of a Korean confederation, facilitated by the linkage of railroads bringing together the communities of ethnic Koreans.

The formation of a Korean confederation, regardless of whether it might be further aligned with the Korean auton-

omous region in China or Mongolia, would be one of the important variables in the debate about forming a Northeast Asian community. The “Final Report of East Asia Study Group,” submitted to the ASEAN Plus Three meeting in Cambodia in 2002, did not mention either North Korea or South Korea.<sup>31</sup> As proposed by President Kim Dae-jung, this report envisioned Korea as a single entity as a member of an East Asian community.

At this juncture, why do we need to think of a confederation rather than a unified state? Despite the presence of nationalist zeal for unification, an increasing number of South Koreans favor gradual political and territorial integration by averting a sudden collapse of North Korea.<sup>32</sup> As demonstrated in the transfer of power from the progressive forces to the conservative forces in the 2007 presidential election, the Lee Myung-bak government shifted its policies vis-à-vis North Korea, creating controversies between the two Koreas and among South Koreans with different opinions. However, South Korea’s general public has been steadily in favor of a gradual unification through the promotion of exchange and cooperation. In an opinion survey in 2008, 54.8 percent said the speed of unification should depend on the social and economic situations of South Korea, while 28.4 percent supported the existence of two states based on the idea of peaceful coexistence.<sup>33</sup> Only 14.4 percent favored a speedy unification accompanied by substantial costs.

At present, there are several scenarios for North Korea’s future change if we exclude the possibility of a collapse that could take place under circumstances beyond prediction, just like the fall of the Berlin Wall. First, North Korea could enter into a closer economic integration with South Korea, which could be the product of a joint inter-Korean business initiative already in progress at the Kaesong industrial complex. Second, in the wake of a pro-Beijing military coup d’état, North Korea might become a satellite state of China and introduce Chinese-style economic change.<sup>34</sup> Third, North Korea might be a U.S.-friendly state as a result of the successful completion of the six-party talks and diplomatic normalization. Under any of these scenarios, however, the end of North Korea’s international isolation could lead to closer economic and social integration with the South, given the two states’ ethnic, cultural, and linguistic homogeneity and geographical proximity.

The actual political process is also in the direction of forming a confederation, as demonstrated in the agreement of the first summit between President Kim Dae-jung and Chairman Kim Jong-il in June 2000. The joint declaration issued after the summit reads, “Acknowledging that there are common elements in the South’s proposal for a confederation and the North’s proposal for a federation of lower stage as the formulae for achieving reunification, the South and the

North agreed to promote reunification in that direction.” Even though there has been no follow-up negotiation on this issue between the two Koreas, the agreement itself has been regarded as a significant step forward in the sense that the two Koreas reached a kind of consensus on the future direction of managing the prolonged division.

Another variable in the formation of a Korean confederation is whether the unity of the Korean peninsula and its nationalist zeal could erupt out of the peninsula and into some parts of China and even Mongolia. Already the Beijing government has paid keen attention to the issue of irredentism, often uttered by Korean nationalists in their use of such expressions as the “restoration of old lands.”<sup>35</sup> According to a report by Andrei Lankov, the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture in China’s Jilin Province, with about half of South Korea’s land area, saw the number of its ethnic Koreans dwindle from 60 percent of the population in 1952 to 36 percent in 2000 as a result of the Chinese government’s assimilation policies and the ethnic Koreans’ migration to the other developed parts of China or even South Korea. Even though ethnic Koreans identify themselves as Chinese, they retain Korean culture and language, leaving open the possibility that they can forge a closer link with a confederal Korea in the future. Many ethnic Koreans, who are originally from North Korea, consider the economic hardship of their fatherland a disgrace, whereas the prosperity of South Korea has been interpreted as a new opportunity. Therefore, the formation of a Korean confederation will not only lead to the economic development of North Korea but also substantially increase economic opportunities in Yanbian and its neighboring areas.

Beyond China, there has been a series of debates on the possible formation of a special political and economic link between South Korea and Mongolia, given the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic similarities of the two countries. As one of the interesting developments, scholars and specialists from the two countries organized in Seoul on 20 March 2007 a seminar entitled “Significance of Confederation between Korea and Mongolia.”<sup>36</sup> The Mongolian embassy in Seoul was responsible for inviting the speakers from Mongolia. Since diplomatic normalization in 1990, the two countries have promoted multilevel exchange, including summit talks. Presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun visited Mongolia in 1999 and 2006, while Presidents Punsalmaagiin Ochirbat and Natsagiin Bagabandi of Mongolia visited South Korea in 1991 and 2001.

The economic complementarities of the two countries are one of the magnets for increasing exchange and cooperation. Mongolia, dubbed the second largest land-locked country in the world after Kazakhstan, has a small population of 2.9 million and rich natural resources. When he

was a presidential candidate, President Lee Myung-bak was upbeat about the possibility of forming a confederation with Mongolia because South Korea could find it easy to provide a significant amount of economic assistance to Mongolia, given its small population and the possibility of useful synergies.<sup>37</sup>

In the areas of security and politics, the rise of China, which can be translated into both challenges and opportunities for South Korea and Mongolia, has encouraged the two countries to enhance cooperation if not a balance-of-power coalition against China. The Chinese government's history projects, which aimed to take a new look at the definition of ancient Chinese kingdoms, have embarrassed the historians and ordinary people of South Korea and Mongolia. As China's demand for oil and natural resources to sustain its economic growth attracted the attention of global trade watchers, the two countries have been concerned about the developments in which the Chinese government and specialists in history have opted for the cultural appropriation of the histories of China's neighboring countries.

While it is making no visible progress from the standpoint of actual political processes, the idea of a "greater Korea" has been increasingly explored by South Korea's film and television industries. With the freedom of expression introduced with the end of authoritarian rule, the South Korean entertainment industry has during the past decade extensively explored two themes: inter-Korean rapprochement and the heroism of ancient Koreans in Manchuria. Among Korean movies dealing with inter-Korean rapprochement are *Joint Security Area* (2000), *Whistling Princess* (2002), *Taegukgi: Brotherhood of War* (2003) and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* (2005). Themes related to Koguryo (37 B.C.–A.D. 668) and Palhae (698–926), two Korean empires that once ruled Manchuria and the northern part of the Korean peninsula, and nostalgia for Koreans' lives in Manchuria during Japan's colonial rule were featured in such period dramas and films as *Yongaesomun* (SBS period drama, 2006), *Tae-wangsasingi* (MBC period drama, 2007), *Taejoyong* (KBS period drama, 2008), *Jumong* (MBC period drama, 2008), *Paramuinana* (KBS period drama, 2008), *Dachimawa Lee* (2008), and *The Good, the Bad, the Weird* (2008).

### **Dynamic of Three-Way Cooperation in Northeast Asia**

In the discipline of international politics, there have been debates over polarity; for example, "Is bipolarity more stable than multipolarity?" Neorealist Kenneth Waltz views bipolarity as simple, which reduces the chances of miscalculation; however, David Singer and Karl Deutsch argue that a multipolar system tends to be stable because uncertainty encourages decision makers to make calculations in

consideration of the larger number of actors involved.<sup>38</sup> The bipolarity of the United States and the Soviet Union, as witnessed during the Cold War, demonstrated a long-standing rivalry and competition by the time one party lost its status. In a similar way, China, a hegemonic contender, and Japan, the world's second-largest economy and key alliance partner of the United States, have been stuck in political rivalry in spite of rising economic interdependence.

China is an emerging hegemon, working to build its own structure of international security as demonstrated in its leadership in organizing and developing the SCO, a security mechanism of six countries—China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—and four observers—India, Iran, Mongolia, and Pakistan. The SCO, often billed as an anti-Western alliance, was originally built to address problems between China and its bordering states, but it has expanded into a regional security framework in which to discuss such issues as separatism, terrorism, and extremism, timed with Uzbekistan's entry in 2001 and attendance of the observer states.<sup>39</sup> In the wake of the failure of its imperialist integrationist project, dubbed the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, in the early twentieth century, Japan has been often compared with Britain in terms of its identity vis-à-vis the United States and its continental neighbors. Because of Japan's military alliance with the United States and entrenched distrust toward continental powers, Japan finds it difficult to enmesh itself entirely in a regional security framework.

The emergence of a Korean confederation is therefore likely to become a new variable with a potential for shifting this rivalry. How could a Korean confederation contribute to creating a Northeast Asian security community? The answer lies in a set of ideas or policies this Korean confederation is likely to pursue:

First, a Korean confederation is likely to take an independent path in foreign and military affairs in a departure from South Korea's substantial reliance on the United States and North Korea's dependence on China.<sup>40</sup> South Korea has already started a process to secure wartime operational rights from the United States while seeking to dissolve the Combined Forces Command to promote autonomy in military decisions and actions. Therefore, the emergence of a Korean confederation will contribute to shifting the current political rivalry between pro-U.S. forces (Japan and South Korea) and anti-U.S. forces (China, North Korea).

Second, a Korean confederation will seek the role of an honest power broker between the United States and China and between China and Japan. When he mentioned South Korea's role as "a balancer," President Roh Moo-hyun sought to illustrate South Korea's shifting identity from an alliance

partner of the United States to a new power broker in this region. However, Roh was forced to retract it because international and domestic observers dismissed it as infeasible, given South Korea's political capability and dependence on its alliance with the United States as a bedrock of deterrence against any threat from North Korea.

Third, a Korean confederation, depending on its diplomatic skills and economic viability, could be a catalyst in accelerating the debate about forming a Northeast Asian security community. As a minor power compared with China and Japan, a Korean confederation would resort to multilateralism as a way to ensure its security. So far, both North and South Korea have concentrated their diplomatic activities on winning a competition of legitimacy to emerge as the standard-bearer of the Korean nation. Once confederated, the two Koreas are likely to devote themselves to creating a system of cooperative security in the way that, in Europe, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg formed the Benelux trade agreement and became active supporters of European integration with their bigger partners, Germany, France, and Italy.<sup>41</sup> South Korea has already emerged as the most active player in promoting the idea of a regional community, with President Kim Dae-jung's initiatives giving birth to the East Asian Vision Group and the East Asian Study Group.

Although complicated, the three-way system of competition and cooperation has the potential of speeding up the process of multilateral diplomacy. The emerging Korean confederation and the shifting roles and partial withdrawal of U.S. military bases in this region will galvanize international and regional efforts to address a new set of political, military, and ideational challenges such as territorial and historical disputes and the accompanying nationalist uproars, a possible arms race to fill the vacuum left by the partial withdrawal of U.S. military bases, and the questions of identities and norms regarding how a state should see itself in relation to the other states in this region and what standard of behavior might be appropriate in response to shifting identities. To ensure continued economic growth and cultural exchange, the Northeast Asian states are likely to intensify dialogue to avert any crisis and establish a *modus operandi* to reduce political tension.

The institutionalization of cooperation on multiple levels among the Northeast Asian countries and interested external powers will be one of the priority tasks for handling old and new security challenges. In this way, the six-party talks and the three-way meeting of China, Japan, and South Korea can be regarded as two initial steps in this direction. These initiatives are expected to take shape in the form of the Northeast Asian version of the SCO as a subregional grouping of countries sharing a common history and borders but still endowed with a more enhanced level of equality and openness

than the SCO. Even though a Northeast Asian grouping can borrow some ideas on confidence-building measures from the OSCE, the emerging Northeast Asian security community (which I proposed calling the Pyongyang Cooperation Organization) will be different from the OSCE, an inter-regional grouping of 56 states stretching from Vancouver to Vladivostok. It has been argued that Pyongyang is the right city to accommodate this organization's secretariat because designating Beijing, Tokyo, or Seoul is unthinkable owing to the identity-driven rivalries of the regional powers. Pyongyang could emerge as a new center of regional diplomacy, timed with North Korea's diplomatic normalization with the United States and Japan to be followed by large-scale development projects sponsored by the United Nations and other international agencies. Given a set of norms established in the multilateral talks in East Asia, especially in the ASEAN process, the member states of this security community will likely resort to intergovernmentalism, valuing the process of consensus building and avoiding legalistic approaches, instead of adopting a relationship of supranationalism witnessed in the European integration process.<sup>42</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper argues that North Korea's political transition into a normal state and the formation of a Korean confederation will be a notable milestone on the road map to the establishment of a Northeast Asian security community. This paper suggests that, in parallel with the progress of inter-Korean integration, the countries in this region will seek to form a security community to address many pending intraregional disputes, such as conflicting territorial claims and history issues. So far, these issues have not been identified and addressed as priority issues in bilateral and multilateral negotiations because of a set of imminent threats to regional security posed mainly by North Korea. In other words, the unsettled Cold War legacies, as well as countries' historical grudges against each other, have actually prevented new post-Cold War integrationist initiatives from blossoming into a regional security community.

After North Korea manages to establish diplomatic ties with the United States and Japan and the two Koreas move to form a confederation, the window of opportunity will be open wide for the creation of a regional security regime. In fact, momentum to form a security community is likely to arise in an era of uncertainty, ushered in by a series of seismic events such as the formation of a Korean confederation, a shift in the roles of U.S. military bases in the region, and the rise of nationalist clashes accompanying territorial and history issues. These developments will enable the Northeast Asian countries and possibly the United States and Russia to intensify efforts to institutionalize the way

they engage with one another to avert any future crisis and enhance mutual security.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> T. J. Pempel, ed., *Remapping East Asia: The Constitution of a Region* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Samuel S. Kim, ed., *The International Relations of Northeast Asia* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> See “China,” *World Factbook* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2008), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Gerrit Gong, “The Standard of ‘Civilisation’ in International Society,” in *The Expansion of International Society*, ed. Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> *New York Times*, 24 September 2008.

<sup>6</sup> For instance, Sejong Institute identifies 2020 as a year for the formation of a Korean confederation; see Chung Sung-jang, ed., *Hankukui kukajollyak 2020: Taebuk tongil* [South Korea’s state strategy 2020: Unification with North Korea] (Seoul: Sejong Institute, 2005). Carl E. Haselden Jr. forecasts that the political settlement on unification could be reached by 2015; see Carl E. Haselden Jr., “The Effects of Korean Unification on the U.S. Military Presence in Northeast Asia,” *Parameters* 32 (2002): 120–27.

<sup>7</sup> Park Myung-lim, *Tongbuka pyonghwagongdongcheui hyongsong-gwa chonmang* [Formation and prospects of a peace community in Northeast Asia], 2004, <http://220.72.21.30/pub/docu/kr/AG/08/AG082004XBL/AG08-2004-XBL-001.PDF>.

<sup>8</sup> Kim Kang-il, professor at Yanbian University, attributed economic backwardness in China’s three northeastern provinces to the Korean division; see *Yonhap News*, 2 October 2008.

<sup>9</sup> The idea of the Korean-Mongolian confederation has already been circulated on various occasions, with seminars on the topic being organized and a maverick South Korean presidential candidate arguing on a TV program that Korean-Mongolian unification should come first, before an inter-Korean unity.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Wendt, “Why a World State Is Inevitable,” *European Journal of International Relations* 9, no. 4 (2003): 491–542.

<sup>11</sup> Peter J. Katzenstein, *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 1.

<sup>12</sup> For various types of a regional order, see Kim, *International Relations of Northeast Asia*, 53.

<sup>13</sup> *The Observer*, 28 September 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Kim Soung-chul, “Multilateral Security and Economic Cooperation in Northeast Asia,” *Sejong Policy Studies* 4, no. 2 (2008): 265–98.

<sup>15</sup> For the definition of a regime, see Steven Krasner, “Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables,” *International Organization* 36, no. 2 (1982): 185–205.

<sup>16</sup> Chung Eunsook, “Cooperative Security Regimes: A Comparison of OSCE and ARF,” *Sejong Policy Studies* 1, no. 1 (2005): 183–239.

<sup>17</sup> Tsuneo Akaha, ed., *Politics and Economics in Northeast Asia: Nationalism and Regionalism in Contention* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> Aaron L. Friedberg, “Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia,” *International Security* 18, no. 3 (1993/1994): 5–33.

<sup>19</sup> Kim, *International Relations of Northeast Asia*; David C. Kang, “Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks,” *International Security* 27, no. 4 (2003): 57–85.

<sup>20</sup> See “The Future of Regional Stability and Regional Security Mechanisms in the Asia-Pacific Region,” in *Security Issues in the Asia-Pacific Region*, no. 2 in NIDS Joint Research Series (Tokyo: National Institute for Defense Studies, March 2008), Chapter 3.

<sup>21</sup> Haselden, “The Effects of Korean Unification on the U.S. Military Presence in Northeast Asia.”

<sup>22</sup> T. J. Pempel, “Regionalism in Northeast Asia: An American Perspective” (policy paper in Regional Integration in Northeast Asia: Issues and Strategies, University of Incheon, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Song Min-soon, Foreign Minister of South Korea. “Korea’s Role for Peace and Cooperation in Northeast Asia,” Keynote Speech for the Northeast Asian Network, Yonsei University, Seoul, 29 January 2008, <http://news.mofat.go.kr/ene/newspaper/articleview.php?master=&aid=685&ssid=11&mvid=479>.

<sup>24</sup> “China Overtakes the U.S. as Japan’s Largest Trading Partner,” Japan External Trade Organization, 28 February 2008, [www.jetro.go.jp/en/news/releases/20080229066-news](http://www.jetro.go.jp/en/news/releases/20080229066-news).

<sup>25</sup> David Leheny, “A Narrow Place to Cross Swords: Soft Power and the Politics of Japanese Popular Culture in East Asia,” in *Beyond Japan: The Dynamics of East Asian Regionalism*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraiishi (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 211–33; Katzenstein, *A World of Regions*, 162–67.

<sup>26</sup> *Mainichi Shimbun*, 6 August 1997.

<sup>27</sup> Yoo Jin-kyoo, *Sajahoedam gyonggwawa pukhanui hyopsangjollyak* [The progress of the four-party talks and North Korea’s negotiation strategy] (Seoul: Korea Research Institute for Strategy, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> *Yonhap News*, 2 September 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Kim, *International Relations of Northeast Asia*, 11–12.

<sup>30</sup> Son Key-young, *South Korean Engagement Policies and North Korea: Identities, Norms and the Sunshine Policy* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> “Final Report of the East Asia Study Group” (report prepared after the ASEAN Plus Three summit, 4 November 2002, Phnom Penh, Cambodia), [www.aseansec.org/viewpdf.asp?file=/pdf/easg.pdf](http://www.aseansec.org/viewpdf.asp?file=/pdf/easg.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> *New York Times*, 20 October 2004.

<sup>33</sup> *Donga Ilbo*, 15 August 2008.

<sup>34</sup> See “China May Back Coup against Kim,” *The Australian*, 16 October 2006; this article was published after North Korea’s nuclear test.

<sup>35</sup> Andrei Lankov, “The Gentle Decline of the ‘Third Korea,’” *Asia Times Online*, 16 August 2007, [www.atimes.com/atimes/China/IH16Ad01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/IH16Ad01.html).

<sup>36</sup> *Shindonga*, 1 June 2007.

<sup>37</sup> *Donga Ilbo*, 18 May 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979); David Singer and Karl Deutsch, “Multipolar Power Systems and International Stability,” *World Politics* 16, no. 3 (1964): 390–406.

<sup>39</sup> Alyson J. K. Bailes, Pál Dunay, Pan Guang, and Mikhail Troitskiy, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Policy Paper no. 17 (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute [SIPRI], May 2007), <http://books.sipri.org/files/PP/SIPRIPP17.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> Chen Pengjun, professor at Beijing University, interview in *Hankyoreh*, 2 January 2002; Professor Chen highlighted the possibility of a unified Korea adopting an equidistant, peace-oriented, neutral diplomacy.

<sup>41</sup> Gérard Roland, “European Integration: What Lessons for Northeast Asia?” (policy paper in *Regional Integration in Northeast Asia: Issues and Strategies*, University of Incheon, 2007).

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