

Shifting Strategic & Diplomatic Relations with the Koreans

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CONTENTS

Preface	vii
Dealing with North Korea: Taking Stock of 2008	
No Hugging No Learning <i>Michael Schiffer</i>	1
North Korean Questions: Taking Stock of 2008 <i>Lee Shin-wha</i>	15
Completing the Strategic Transformation: The U.S. Military Alliances with Korea and Japan	
The U.S.-Japan Alliance and the U.S.-ROK Alliance <i>James Przystup</i>	43
Preparing for Future Threats and Regional Challenges: The ROK-U.S. Military Alliance in 2008–2009 <i>Bruce E. Bechtol Jr.</i>	75
Korea and Japan’s Strategic Relationship: Where to From Here	
The Future of Korea-Japan’s Strategic Relationship: A Case for Cautious Optimism <i>Park Cheol-hee</i>	101
Beyond Bilateral Approaches: Regionalizing Japan-Korea Tensions <i>T.J. Pempel</i>	119
Alternative Futures: U.S.-Korea Economic Ties with and without a Free Trade Agreement	
Can the U.S. and South Korea Sing without KORUS? The Economic and Strategic Effects of the KORUS FTA <i>Mark Manyin, William Cooper</i>	135
KORUS FTA as a Better Alternative to Manage the Bilateral Economic Relationship <i>Lee Jaemin</i>	159
Korea-Japan Economic Ties	
Korea: the Next Asian domino in Global Crisis <i>Richard Katz</i>	177

BEYOND BILATERAL APPROACHES: REGIONALIZING JAPAN-KOREA TENSIONS

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CONTENTS

- I. Introduction
- II. Changing Security Postures
- III. A Way Forward?: Moving beyond Bilateralism
- IV. Conclusion

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I. Introduction

Security relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea, like those of any other two closely entwined neighbors, glisten with the multiple facets of complexity. A number of structural conditions and recent political actions underscore areas favoring bilateral cooperation. Both countries are political democracies with sophisticated economies; they have numerous similarities in their policy profiles and political constrictions that spring from that mixture. The two were on the same side during the Cold War and each has a strong security tie with the United States that includes extensive basing of U.S. military forces on the two countries' soil. Unlike most European democracies that were skeptical of the George W. Bush administration's case for invading Iraq, Japan and Korea dutifully dispatched national forces as participants in America's "coalition of the willing." The two have a deep and broad trading relationship, and each country sends large numbers of students, tourists, and businesspeople to the other's country. A prior ban on Japanese music, books, and films was lifted in Korea starting in 1998 while the Japanese public went through a crazed fascination with incoming Korean soap opera, including one of its leading men, Bae Yong-joon (Yon-sama to his bedazzled, largely middle-aged female fans in Japan). The youth of both countries are gluttonous consumers of the latest pop culture products from the other. In short, considerable connectedness across a range of military, economic, and cultural arenas could stimulate a positive security relationship.

And indeed, at their second summit following Korean president Lee Myung-bak's inauguration in April 2008, he and outgoing Japanese prime minister Fukuda Yasuo pledged among other things "to build a future-oriented Korea-Japan relationship and a mature partnership based on pragmatic diplomacy." They further agreed to enhance cooperation in dealing with the North Korean nuclear issue and the North's abduction of Japanese citizens, to expand bilateral exchanges with a particular concentration on the youth of both countries, and to hold working-level consultations aimed at restarting stalled negotiations toward a bilateral economic partnership agreement. Lee set aside a special economic zone for Japanese manufacturing investment while Fukuda invited Lee to participate in the July 2008 Group of Eight summit as he also expressed his hope to visit Korea in the second half of the year for additional summit talks.

Powerful contradictory evidence, however, underscores the frequently contentious security relationship between the two. In April–May 2006, for example, Seoul dispatched 20 gunboats to prevent a planned Japanese survey of the waters around the Liancourt Rocks (called Dokdo in Korea; Takeshima in Japan), islets claimed

by both countries and currently under Korean administration (PINR 2006). Japan has signed on to participate in the controversial ballistic missile defense system being installed by the United States across Northeast Asia; Korea has opted out. Similarly, Seoul has declined to participate in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), a sea-borne interdiction system led by the U.S. Navy and involving 11 or more countries. PSI is designed to prevent the secret transfer of weapons of mass destruction. Japan and Korea have typically taken dramatically different positions regarding the DPRK's nuclear ambitions, with the ROK, under Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, pursuing a decade-long Sunshine Policy focused on economic engagement. Japan, in contrast, has invoked harsh sanctions against the North, implementing restrictions often tougher than those called for by United Nations resolutions. Japan's National Defense Program Guidelines identifies the DPRK as a potential military threat, while the ROK has done all it can to treat the North less as a military threat and more as a potential partner for brotherly reunification. In the six-party talks, Japan has voiced regular and throaty demands for a "full accounting" of the status of Japanese citizens abducted by the DPRK during the 1970s and 1980s. In contrast, the ROK, despite having lost multiply more South Koreans to abduction by the North than Japan, has rarely raised the issue, fearing that to do so would worsen North-South bilateral efforts.

In short, despite many reasons why Japan and Korea should find themselves on similar sides of most issues, the reality is that they frequently view their respective security situations through completely contradictory lenses. Ironically, it has been during the post-Cold War years, during which both countries found themselves on the "winning side," that the differences between the two countries have become even more contentious. The reasons for this are the contradictory directions taken by the two countries after the straitjacket of the Cold War gave each country enhanced strategic flexibility. And not surprisingly, the directions taken by each have shown the growing influence of domestic political factors, often overriding security considerations.

II. Changing Security Postures

The end of the Cold War has dovetailed with changes in the domestic politics of both Japan and the ROK, which in turn have produced two alternative security postures. Many aspects of this mutual repositioning have resulted in the two countries moving further apart and holding differing perspectives on their respective security situations along with relations with one another. Of particular importance is the fact that, since the end of the Cold War, the two countries have moved in quite different directions with regard to their respective ties with the

United States, China, and the DPRK. These new positions have left the two countries with exaggerated differences and antagonistic strategic profiles.

Japan

Consider Japan first. Throughout the Cold War, Japanese domestic politics and foreign policy were effectively driven by a one-party dominant regime. The pro-U.S. Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) enjoyed comfortable majorities in both houses of parliament and consequently was able to fill virtually all cabinet posts and to implement most of its desired policy directions from 1955 until the party split in 1993. Passing legislation was often frustrating and complicated, but when the chips were down the LDP almost always had the required votes to ensure passage of its programs. The major opposition party, the Japan Socialist Party (JSP), was particularly critical of Japan's defense posture, its close ties with the United States, and anything that challenged the so-called peace constitution. But the JSP never gained control of as many as one-third of the seats in parliament, making the party a frequently toothless opposition (Pempel 1998; Scheiner 2006 *inter alia*).

Throughout the Cold War, Japan was a reliably pro-U.S. ally but one that also relied heavily on the widespread public support for pacifism so as to resist spending more than the talismanic 1 percent of GNP on its own military. Japan equally strongly resisted U.S. calls to dispatch Japanese forces abroad or to provide "boots on the ground" for U.S. operations. This was most clear during the first invasion of Iraq in 1990 when Japan's huge \$13 billion "contribution" was widely disdained as mere "checkbook diplomacy."

During this time, Japan's primary policy focus involved economic development, and the stunning geometric expansion of its GNP provided consistent quarterly testimony to the success of its government-business cooperation. Both government and business kept their collective eyes on the target of national economic development while leaving hard-core security matters largely to the U.S. military, the Seventh Fleet, and the nuclear umbrella.

Japan's security profile involved balancing against excessive dependence on the U.S. military in at least two ways. First, although the United States has traditionally defined security almost exclusively in military terms, Japan has opted for what it labels a "comprehensive security" [*sôgô anzen hoshô*] or what Hughes and Fukushima (2004, 61–63) have referred to as "bilateralism plus." Resource poor and late to industrialize, Japan has continually been forced to confront its gnawing dependency on foreign imports of raw materials and its

inescapable vulnerability to economic shocks from abroad (Pyle and Heginbotham 2001, 77). Formally articulated by Prime Minister Ōhira Masayoshi in 1980, the doctrine initially centered on Japan's need to cope in an integrated fashion with a range of nonmilitary challenges to its national well-being coming from economic, environmental, food, energy, pandemic, and illegal drug challenges, among others. It subsequently was expanded to include Japan's active pursuit of a multidimensional and positive approach to the achievement of national security.

The second balance to Japan's high security dependence on the United States involved the country's ongoing policy efforts to foster positive ties with East Asia. Foreign and technological aid and corporate investment complemented systematic government efforts at normalizing relations between Japan and its neighbors while simultaneously creating a hedge against excessive reliance on the U.S. market.

This security profile changed fundamentally during the "regime shift" that Japan has been undergoing since the early 1990s (Pempel 1998). The economic bubble that had given Japan such an aura of unrivaled prosperity during the last half of the 1980s burst with a bang and ushered in an 18-year-long "lost decade" that has still not been concluded by a return to high growth, expanding capital and labor productivity, and regularized employment. As the economy nosedived, the LDP split, losing its governing majority with the result that a crazy-quilt combination of opposition parties controlled the levers of government for nine months. Only after that did a weakened LDP return to government, which it has controlled—in coalition—ever since.

Within this maelstrom of change, Japan's military strategy underwent a series of previously unimaginable changes, most conspicuously during the overlapping administrations of Koizumi Junichiro and George W. Bush. Following the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States by al Qaeda operatives, Koizumi was quick to snuggle into a demonstrably closer embrace of the United States and its military activities. Through a series of domestic legislative changes, Koizumi gained permission to dispatch several Maritime Self-Defense Force ships to the Indian Ocean in support of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. He subsequently sent some 500 Japanese troops to Iraq. The former Japanese Defense Agency saw its legal status boosted as it became a full-fledged ministry. New defense plans were no longer marked by prior timidity and a narrow definition of defense but instead were characterized by an emphasis on power projection, amphibious capabilities, force transformation, and improved command and control (Hughes 2005, 122; Samuels 2007).

A new military outline in 2004 also broke precedent by explicitly identifying China and the DPRK as potential security concerns to Japan while stressing the country's need to deal with both ballistic missile and guerrilla attacks rather than the previously planned-for invasions. New too was a recalibration of activities involving Japanese airspace and territorial waters. Geographically, Japan's security interests were overtly expanded from defense of the home islands to encompass a larger mission that included international security, international peacekeeping, and counterterrorism as key targets of Japan's overall national defense strategy. To meet these newly identified threats, Japan, it was argued, needed a new "multifunctional," military capability with a centralized SDF command and a rapid reaction force" (Pempel 2006; 2008a). In addition, Japan's Coast Guard was substantially upgraded, though technically the JCG is not a military body (Samuels 2007/2008).

The United States was, during this time, also redefining its security mission to put more emphasis on logistical flexibility by shifting from its prior reliance on fixed bases to ward off predictably styled attacks from presumed opponents. And Koizumi embraced these changes as well. He chose to join the United States in its missile defense program, to allow the stationing of the U.S. Army's I Corps headquarters in Japan, thereby linking Japan more closely to U.S. global, as opposed to Japanese, security strategy. He also joined with the United States in articulating a policy of calculated ambiguity over Taiwan and how Japan would react to potential Chinese hostilities toward the island's government.

Koizumi's robust embrace of Bush's security activities was paralleled by a distinctive turn away from Asia, most especially following his visit to Pyongyang in September 2002. That visit, designed to begin the process of normalization of bilateral Japan-DPRK relations, led to what Koizumi and his advisers anticipated would be a North Korean apology about the abductees program maintained by the North in the 1970s and 1980s. The apology was made, but instead of easing the way to smooth bilateral normalization, it led to an outburst of anti-DPRK sentiments within Japan, fueled by the media and right-wing politicians, among them the eventual prime minister, Abe Shinzo. As Bush toughened the U.S. position toward the DPRK and its nuclear program, Koizumi backed away from the normalization process while the abductees issue enjoyed daily sensationalization by the media, often under explicit instructions from the government.

The abductees issue played into the broadly perceived Japanese shift to the right on important historical and cultural issues. The Japanese Ministry of Education continued every four years to legitimate textbooks that denied much of Japan's aggression during World War II, that downplayed the significance

of forced prostitution (comfort women) to serve the Japanese military, and that pushed claims of Japanese sovereignty over Dokto/Takeshima in a variety of ways. Koizumi, through his regular and quite public visits to the controversial Yasukuni shrine, also tapped into a lodestone of nationalist frustration over Japan's dramatic decline in relative economic power and China's corresponding rise in stature. Unlike Prime Minister Nakasone's decision to forestall such visits in the face of Asian opposition nearly two decades earlier, Koizumi regularly spurned the protests of both China and the ROK as attempts to interfere with Japanese domestic politics.

The result was a brusque termination of both bilateral and trilateral summits among their leaders. Japanese official development assistance to China was shifted from multiyear pledges designed to foster infrastructure creation in favor of annual allotments directed at environmental protection, increased living standards, education, institution building, and technology transfer. And of course, as noted above, both China and the DPRK were explicitly identified in Japanese defense plans as potential security threats.

Korea

The ROK in the post-Cold War period moved in a very different direction. Conservative regimes had dominated Korean politics for the first decade following democratization in 1988, and these governments remained largely faithful to preexisting ROK security doctrines, including a concentrated focus on preparing for potential invasion from the North and maintaining close military links to the United States. Economic ties with China improved, but bilateral political ties remained frosty. With the election of Kim Dae-jung as president in December 1997 and the imposition of the International Monetary Fund's financial constraints following Korea's monetary crisis in 1997–98, the Korean government began a series of systematic moves in a quite different direction. Kim used the IMF conditions as a weapon to attack the powerful *chaebol* and to press for industrial deconcentration.

In foreign policy, Kim's most noteworthy shift was his introduction of the Sunshine Policy designed to engage the DPRK economically and to replace the ROK's previously clenched fist toward the North with a more open hand—frequently offering unqualified (and, critics would argue, naive) economic assistance. In 2000, Kim made a breakthrough visit to Pyongyang, meeting with Kim Jong-il, the first visit between the top leaders of the two Koreas since the end of the Korean War. The visit led eventually to Kim's receiving the Nobel Prize for Peace, an award tainted by the subsequent revelation that the visit had

been made possible by a \$500 million payment by the South to the North and the failure by the DPRK leader to reciprocate with a promised visit to Seoul.

Meanwhile, although Kim's Sunshine Policy received the blessings of the Clinton administration State Department, the ROK's relations with the United States deteriorated precipitously following the ascent of George W. Bush to the presidency. Unlike the friendly personal relations that evolved between Bush and Koizumi, those between Bush and Kim got off to a dreadful start during Bush's first telephone call to Kim Dae-jung in February 2001. Despite an extensive briefing about Kim, Bush demonstrated complete unfamiliarity with Kim's long-standing efforts on behalf of his country's democratization and reunification. When Kim began urging Bush to engage North Korea diplomatically, the president put his hand over the mouthpiece of the telephone and asked, "Who is this guy! I can't believe how naive he is!" (Pritchard 2007, 52). Relations deteriorated further during Kim's subsequent visit to Washington as Bush began what proved to be a complete U-turn away from Clinton's efforts to improve relations with the DPRK, initiating what proved to be the Bush administration's failed efforts to bring about regime change in the North. Secretary of State Colin Powell, for example, who indicated a willingness to pick up U.S.-DPRK relations from where Clinton had left off, was publicly rebuked and afterward commented that he had gotten a little bit too far forward on his skis (Kaplan 2004, 3).

Bilateral links between the United States and the ROK became even worse under Kim's successor, Roh Moo-hyun, who continued Kim's engagement efforts with the North and went further than his predecessor in adopting what he called a "balancer" role in Northeast Asia. For Roh, closer ties to China followed logically. Normalization between the ROK and China had taken place in 1992, and the improvement in ROK ties to China under Kim and Roh began to match the growing economic and cultural links between the two, leading to progressively warmer ties politically and diplomatically (interrupted notably by the Chinese claims to having been historically in control of Koguryo and excising all official references to Korean history prior to 1948 on its Web site).

On the occasion of Prime Minister Zhu Rongji's visit to South Korea in October 2000, the "South Korea–China cooperative partnership," which had been launched in 1998 during President Kim Dae-jung's visit to China, was upgraded to "comprehensive cooperative ties." The result was expanded ties in both the diplomatic and military arenas, with military visits and exchanges subsequently being undertaken. A succession of cordial state visits took place during the Roh Moo-hyun years as bilateral ties continued to warm (Park 2002).

Meanwhile, as Kim and Roh moved to improved ROK-DPRK ties as well as links with China, Bush was clearly not interested in any engagement with North Korea's president, Kim Jong-il, the man he dismissively referred to as a "dwarf" and someone he "loathed." Eventually, as is well known, the United States, charging the DPRK with maintaining a secret highly enriched uranium program for nuclear development, scrapped the existing Agreed Framework for dealing with the DPRK. The DPRK responded by evicting International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors, ending its commitment to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and resuming its plutonium testing (Kaplan 2004). It took considerable time and diplomatic effort to begin the so-called six-party talks in 2003, and for roughly the first three years of negotiations, there was virtually no real give or take as the United States and the DPRK clung stubbornly to fixed positions, with each side essentially demanding nonnegotiable preconditions for the other before any other movement was possible. The ROK, while often critical of the DPRK, was at least as critical of the United States and often found itself siding with China and Russia against the United States and Japan.

U.S.-ROK military ties shifted as U.S. military policies changed. Most centrally, the United States reduced its number of troops stationed in Korea by about 12,500 (roughly one-third of its total) while it also moved its bases back from the Demilitarized Zone and Seoul to three key concentrations further to the south, thus effectively ending the long-standing trip-wire strategy. Additionally, the United States agreed to turn over command of the joint forces to ROK military leadership, a decision greeted with mixed emotions in Korea. To many it represented a substantial reduction in the U.S. commitment to ROK security. To others it involved recognition of the growing importance of ties with China and the South's increasing moves to improve ties to the North. Throughout these shifts, ROK domestic politics swirled as two almost evenly matched and ideologically antagonistic camps struggled for preeminence.

Bilateral Consequences

Bilateral Japanese-Korean ties went through substantial ups and downs as the two countries' domestic politics became a key driver of vital aspects of the foreign relations of both Japan and Korea. Under Kim and Roh it was the political left that drove policy changes in somewhat predictable directions for Korea, while Koizumi (and to an extent Abe, despite his visits to Beijing and Seoul) was pulling Japan toward the political right.

With the election of Lee Myun-bak, an official effort was made to change course and improve sagging ties to the United States and Japan. President Lee found a

more willing Japanese partner in outgoing Prime Minister Fukuda than earlier Korean presidents had found in Koizumi. But it remains to be seen whether bilateral ties can continue to improve under the new administration of Aso Taro, who has a more nationalistic and right-wing reputation than Fukuda and whose principal political concerns have been domestic politics and the lower house elections, which must be held by fall 2009.

During the six-party talks, relations between the ROK and Japan were also frequently at distant odds. Throughout the process, Korea (along with China) continued to push for the most moderate and accommodating positions toward the DPRK while Japan and the United States took up opposite positions as hard-liners. There was no evidence, however, that the four were playing a good cop–bad cop routine. Their differences reflected deeply held convictions.

Yet the United States began to shift toward a more moderate position following the DPRK's missile and nuclear tests in 2006 as well as the Democratic Party's capture of both houses of Congress in November of that year. This left Japan standing alone in hard opposition to the moves being made as the new U.S. position saw it much closer to those of the ROK and China. For Japan, driven largely by domestic political considerations, the abductees issue remained at least as important as denuclearization (along with removal of DPRK missiles or at least a cessation of missile tests, which was not really part of the official negotiations at all). And Japan refused to withdraw its sanctions or to honor its prior promises of economic aid to the North until it received what it called a "satisfactory" account of the abductees.

Relations were also damaged by the ROK position on Japan's effort to secure a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. China, of course, has a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and Japan's efforts have to be seen in the context of its emerging competition with China for status and influence. Nonetheless, Japan's efforts in 2005 to gain similar representation were successfully opposed by China and the ROK as well as by much of Asia (with at best tepid support from the United States). Indeed, many Asians, including many South Koreans, saw a permanent Japanese seat as simply a second seat for the United States.

The relatively recent Japanese demand for an international adjudication of the sovereignty question concerning Dokto/Takeshima has also become problematic. For the Japanese Ministry of Defense it is now more or less obligatory to include plans for defense of Takeshima in its annual white paper, which in turn catalyzes criticisms from the Korean government, which has occupied the islands since

the end of World War II. And periodic outbursts of chauvinism from Shimane Prefecture about Takeshima as a historical part of the prefecture have been equally damaging to bilateral ties.

Such government-to-government problems are unquestionably real and will require negotiations and skillful diplomacy. But resolving such problems is the standard task of foreign ministry officials and elected politicians. Far more problematic has been the deterioration in the climate of public opinion in the two countries, with waves of anti-Japanese and anti-Korean vehemence bubbling up (and periodically being stirred up) in ways that complicate efforts at quiet diplomacy. Too frequently, politicians and the media frame the historical issues and national differences in terms that reduce the area of potential overlap while reinforcing conflictual understandings of the past. Korean (and Chinese) political leaders tend to pick up on any random Japanese politician's or activist's remark intended for domestic consumption and present it as evidence that Japan is on an irreversible path to nationalistic remilitarization (Suh 2007). The consequence has been a poisoning of public mutual opinions. Thus, for example, the publication of *Kenkanryu* [Hating Korean wave], a Korea-bashing comic book, was quickly and widely reciprocated by the publication of its Korean and Chinese counterparts: *Hyömillyu* [Hating Japan wave] and *Lun Riben* [Discussing Japan] (Seo 2005; Suh 2007). In the autumn of 2005, *Kenkanryu* sold more than 300,000 copies within one month of its publication. Its counterparts were as popular in their respective countries.

Such a climate of animosity at the popular level (see also data from Inoguchi et al. 2005) provides a tempting audience for politicians eager to toss out xenophobic red meat. Remarks in one country then easily generate equal and opposite reactions in the other, setting off a deteriorating downward spiral of comments, the result of which is to further impede the smooth reconciliation of complex bilateral differences.

Is there no way out? The final section of this paper acknowledges the power of top leaders to negotiate compromises to tough issues. But so much thereby depends on personalities. A far more promising long-term solution, I suggest, lies in multilateralizing relations between Japan and the ROK in ways that may soften the bilateral tensions and bring in potential mediators and changes in focus. The result may be a lubrication of otherwise difficult-to-resolve bilateral frictions.

III. A Way Forward? Moving beyond Bilateralism

Korean and Japanese leaders have periodically shown an ability to sideline vexatious issues and to encourage smoother bilateral relations. Perhaps the best example came in 1998 with the Kim-Obuchi summit. The two leaders agreed on the common understanding that “in order for Japan and the Republic of Korea to build solid, good-neighborly and friendly relations in the twenty-first century, it was important that both countries squarely face the past and develop relations based on mutual understanding and trust” (MFA-J 1998). Kim promised to assess Japan less on past history and more on future behavior. Obuchi in turn offered a profound apology to Kim on behalf of the Korean people for the misdeeds of the Japanese government and military during the prewar period. Although the climate improved quickly as a result, relations deteriorated again during the Koizumi years for the reasons noted above.

For that reason, I wish to suggest one important direction offering more hope for long-term resolution of current bilateral tensions. The path ahead, I would contend, lies in moving beyond ROK-Japan bilateralism on the really sensitive and often nonnegotiable issues and shifting them into a multilateral context. In effect, change the venue and change the issues. Doing so would allow currently vexatious issues to become part of a larger agenda with more than two sides participating. Without a doubt, regionalism in Northeast Asia has been slow to develop, even compared with embryonic regional tendencies seen in Southeast Asia. Moreover, Japan and Korea have approached the abstract goal of regionalism with very different end goals in mind (Pempel 2008b; Lee and Jae 2007). Nonetheless, at least two bodies provide some possibility for easing tensions between Japan and Korea.

The first of these is the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) process. APT began in mid-1995 and includes the 10 ASEAN countries plus Japan, China, and the ROK (Pempel 2008a; Tanaka 2007 *inter alia*). One of the more encouraging outgrowths of the regular meetings of APT has been the opportunity for the “plus three” leaders to meet on the sides of the 13-country sessions either bilaterally or trilaterally to address issues of common concern. At times when tensions have been high, no such meetings were held. But behind the scenes the APT has provided an umbrella under which potentially feuding leaders can huddle for quiet discussions.

The leaders of South Korea, China, and Japan have held regular trilateral meetings, and the three countries have also developed regular ministerial meetings on trade, finance, communication, and the environment. At the APT meeting in October

2003 in Bali, the “plus three” countries issued a joint declaration aimed at promoting trilateral cooperation (ASEAN 2003). The declaration pledges further cooperation and dialogue on economic, cultural, educational, environmental, political-military, and security issues; and the leaders also agreed to set up a trilateral committee to promote and implement the cooperative agreements. This institutional arrangement, along with the rapid expansion of economic exchanges, has laid a strong foundation for trilateral cooperation.

At the seventh summit of the leaders of South Korea, China, and Japan, held in Cebu in January 2007 in conjunction with the 12th ASEAN summit, the three leaders agreed to expand trilateral cooperation into the political and security realms by setting up a trilateral mechanism involving regular consultations among senior foreign affairs officials. They also expressed a shared desire to promote cooperation on trade, investment, and energy; and they agreed to initiate trilateral investment negotiations as well. A number of new priorities were jointly named for trilateral cooperation, including finance, science and technology, public health, tourism, logistics and distribution, and youth and teenager communications. The leaders agreed to promote cultural exchanges in a bid to enhance understanding and friendship among the people of the three countries (NIDS 2007). *Kyodo News International* on 14 January 2007 reported also that the three countries would engage in a joint “Year of Cultural Exchanges among China, Japan and Republic of Korea” during 2007.

Something of a major breakthrough occurred during the 2007 meetings. All three leaders in the “plus three” group agreed to a separate meeting in Tokyo during 2008 outside the explicit framework of APT. That meeting was delayed until December owing to the resignation of Prime Minister Fukuda, but the three leaders eventually met in a historic summit near Fusuoka that focused on ways to enhance trilateral cooperation. It also laid the groundwork to become a regularized mechanism for minilateral discussions between the top leaders of Korea and Japan allowing them to explore a range of nontraditional security issues including pandemics, transborder crime, pollution, and the like. The format alone hardly guarantees any grand bargains, but it does offer the opportunity to link otherwise rather separate issues in ways that might provide windows toward more comprehensive approaches to currently troublesome issues.

The second format is the six-party talks. Again, there are no guarantees of success. But the current plans in place for resolving the denuclearization of the peninsula involve breaking the issues into five different working groups or “baskets.” One of the five (chaired by Russia) is tasked with formulating a more long-standing architecture for Northeast Asian cooperation. This body would

become the logical extension of the six-party process if and when it resolves the current outstanding issues surrounding the DPRK nuclear program and mutual security guarantees and economic development assistance. Japan and the ROK have hardly been close in their moves during the six-party process, so again there is no reason to assume that a multilateral forum alone will somehow eradicate current bilateral issues. But again, the chances exist for some version of a grand bargain or perhaps a concert of powers that, if structured effectively and managed carefully, could hold the promise of softening current frictions. Certainly, a new architecture for security in Northeast Asia would allow for a dilution of some of the currently fractious issues in the larger context of regional security involving not just Japan and the ROK but also four neighboring countries, each with their own agendas but, potentially, their own solutions.

IV. Conclusion

Since the end of the Cold War, Japanese-ROK relations have been marked by competing pulls—oftentimes moving the two countries closer together but at other times pushing them widely apart. This paper examines these competing pushes and pulls, arguing that the two countries could potentially resolve some of their more contentious issues by multilateralizing them. At this stage, East Asia has put in place a number of such multilateral bodies. If Korea and Japan can transfer some of the more problematic issues from the bilateral agenda that so often leaves both countries at dagger points into these multilateral forums, there is some hope that the current tensions can be reduced and the issues seen in a more comprehensive context that might induce enhanced cooperation.

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