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CENTER FOR NORTHEAST ASIAN POLICY STUDIES

**THE SIX-PARTY PROCESS, REGIONAL SECURITY
MECHANISMS, AND CHINA-U.S. COOPERATION:
TOWARD A REGIONAL SECURITY MECHANISM FOR A
NEW NORTHEAST ASIA?**

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Table of Contents

Summary	- 3
Introduction	- 4
Assessing the Six-Party Talks	
- Progress	- 5
- Lessons	- 9
- The implementation of “joint statements”	- 11
- Before implementation is complete, North Korea will be a de facto nuclear state	- 12
Negotiating beyond denuclearization and letting a security multilateralism work in Northeast Asia	
- What does “regional security mechanism” mean?	- 13
- Regional security challenges and common interests	- 14
- The role of the Six-Party Talks in building a new regional security mechanism	- 15
- Transformation of the Korean Armistice Agreement	- 16
- The relationship between the Northeast Asian regional security mechanism and existing regional multilateral mechanisms	- 18
- Relations between the Northeast Asian regional security mechanism, the existing U.S.-led bilateral alliance system, and the “trans-Pacific” paradigms	- 21
China-U.S. security cooperation on the DPRK issue and its implications	
- China’s bilateral and regional approach to the DPRK	- 23
- America’s praise for China’s cooperation	- 24
- The limits of Chinese-American security cooperation	- 25
- The future of China-U.S. cooperation in Northeast Asia	- 27
Conclusions and policy suggestions	- 29
Appendix: Chronicle of China’s relations with the DPRK	- 31

Summary

Even though it focuses on a single, specific issue – Korean peninsula denuclearization – the six-party process has served as a catalyst for a more important regional issue: the future of Asia-Pacific security cooperation. The six-party process can be seen as a regional solution to an intractable regional security issue. In the five years since 2003, this patient process has produced considerable progress. The three “joint statements” of the Six-Party Talks provide a relatively balanced and reasonable multilateral “roadmap” to not only resolve the nuclear standoff, but also to develop an operational Northeast Asian security architecture. The Six Party Talks have cautiously encouraged a formal end to the Korean War and enabled key Northeast Asian players to explore a potential mechanism for meeting regional security challenges, but the success of this ad hoc process – that is to say, denuclearization of the Korean peninsula – should not necessarily be regarded as a precondition for such a mechanism. Rather, a regional security mechanism can go boldly and ambitiously beyond the Six-Party Talks. If the six party process is to lay the foundation for a credible Asia-Pacific security mechanism, we must examine how to coordinate and/or harmonize overlapping (and sometimes competing) regional institutions such as ASEAN (and its derivatives) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as well as the existing America-led regional alliance system. The six-party process demonstrates that cooperation among big powers is the key to regional security. Ideally, China and the U.S. should extend their positive cooperation on Korean denuclearization into the realm of regional security, and develop a mechanism that ensures peace, stability and prosperity. In order to do so, however, they must overcome a host of challenging factors; the prospects are still uncertain.

Introduction

Narrowly speaking, as an ad hoc negotiating multilateral process with a specific core mission (denuclearization of the Korean peninsula) the Six-Party Talks can be understood as:

- A process of responding to (before 2005) and managing (after 2005) a nuclear crisis or nuclear issue;
- A diplomatic means of achieving a peaceful settlement of the nuclear issue;
- A process of building mutual confidence and trust;
- A highly time-consuming negotiating process with gradual progress;
- An exploration of a multilateral security mechanism for regional security cooperation.

Thus, the six-party process has several mutually reinforced and mutually supported goals: (1) completing the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula; (2) formally ending the Korean War with a peace treaty; and (3) building a regional (beyond Northeast Asia) mechanism for maintaining peace, stability and prosperity in the 21st century.

The second nuclear crisis between the DPRK (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, hereafter North Korea) and the United States (as well as other regional states) began in 2002. China, the DPRK, and the United States engaged in "three-party talks" in April 2003 as a means of responding to the nuclear crisis.² Shortly thereafter, the talks expanded into the Six-Party Talks, with South Korea, Russia, and Japan joining. The crisis deepened in 2005, as North Korea declared itself a "nuclear weapon state," and it worsened in 2006 when North Korea conducted its first nuclear test. Amid great danger (the U.S. labeled North Korea a point on the "axis of evil"), the six regional powers agreed to deal with the nuclear issue peacefully through multilateral negotiations.

Through the Six-Party Talks, the nuclear issue was, to varying degrees at varying times, managed positively and effectively. America and North Korea have resumed direct dialogue under the six-party framework. Beginning in 2005, the Bush administration spoke less and less about "regime change" in North Korea and seemingly adopted a more pragmatic North Korea policy "reiterating U.S. commitment to security guarantees for Pyongyang and other benefits if it lives up to the deal."³ With America's attitude and tactics changing, the Six-Party Talks reached three "joint statements" between 2005 and 2007. The talks also set other ambitious common goals: replacing the half-century old Korean Armistice Agreement with a permanent peace treaty or

² "It looks like a reacting process to a crisis," Wu Chunsi (Shanghai Institute for International Studies), "The Six-Party Talks: a good platform for broader security cooperation in Northeast Asia," *Korean Journal of Security Affairs*, vol. 12, no. 2, December 2007.

³ Steven Weber and Bruce W. Jentleson, "Cornered in square one," *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 2008.

regime, and establishing a Northeast Asian multilateral peace and security mechanism (PSM). Finally, the management of the Korean nuclear issue has engendered unprecedented security cooperation between China and the United States.

The Asia-Pacific region is at a crossroads. Throughout the “post-Cold War” era, the United States and its allies have sought to maintain the existing bilateral security architecture (the exclusive U.S.-centered alliance system), but given this system’s failure in resolving many common security challenges (especially North Korea’s nuclear program), the time has come to consider a multilateral mechanism. On the other hand, several nascent and informal regional mechanisms, forums, initiatives, and organizations do exist, but they are all weak, disconnected, and even mutually competitive; the region still lacks unified, multilateral, effective regional security architecture.

Born in a changing regional security environment, the Six-Party Talks may help harness growing enthusiasm for regional security cooperation. Since the end of the Cold War, most Asian countries have participated in various sub-regional, regional, and broader regional (trans-regional) multilateral security mechanisms. Recently, more attention has been focused on the possibility of a regional security community covering the entire Asia-Pacific.

This paper looks over the horizon – several years down the road – at the possibility and necessity of an inclusive and effective regional security mechanism. In the first of three parts, the focus is on the Six-Party Talks, asking whether or not it is a special regional approach to replacing direct North Korea-U.S. negotiations. The second part examines the viability of extending the Six-Party Talks to accomplish more ambitious goals through a regional security mechanism. China, in between the United States and North Korea as well as other regional powers, has played a mediating and facilitating role in organizing the six-party process. So, the third part discusses China-U.S. cooperation at the regional level on the North Korea nuclear issue. The paper concludes with policy suggestions not only for the unfinished business of the denuclearization but for the building of a new regional security mechanism.

1. Assessing the Six-Party Talks

Progress

China’s unprecedented leadership in the process has been a key to progress, and Beijing has worked to persuade all the concerned parties to remain engaged with DPRK through the six-party process. This leadership is recognized by American participants and observers such as Charles Pritchard, who has praised China’s efforts: “The shuttle diplomacy, the Chinese going to see the North Koreans, the South Koreans, the Japanese, and the Americans, everybody was in motion at

the foreign minister level and down.”⁴ Chinese-American interaction on North Korea is an example of the growing sharing of global/regional responsibility between the two most important regional powers. More importantly, China supported a functional “peace by pieces” approach⁵ in the talks.

Despite an often slow pace, the Six-Party Talks have made progress. First, the six nations – including the DPRK – agreed on a common objective: a nuclear-free Korean peninsula. The three “joint statements” (September 19, 2005; February 13, 2007; and October 3, 2007) provide evidence of this central goal.⁶

It is a breakthrough that the six parties “committed” in their first “Joint Statement” in September 19, 2005 “to joint efforts for lasting peace and stability in region. The directly related parties will negotiate a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula at an appropriate separate forum. The six parties agreed to explore ways and means for promoting security cooperation in Northeast Asia.”⁷ In other words, they tried to launch key initiatives to Korean denuclearization: the first is talks on “peace regime” on the peninsula; and the second is talks on “multilateral security cooperation” in Northeast Asia. More specifically, the February 13 2007 Joint Statement supported the establishment of a “Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism Working Group” (in addition to other working groups on Denuclearization of the Peninsula, Normalization of DPRK-U.S. Relations, Normalization of DPRK-Japan Relations, and Economy and Energy Cooperation) in order to implement the September 19 Joint Statement).⁸ Russia is responsible for coordinating the working group on a peace and security mechanism.

Of course, all the parties, especially North Korea and the United States, placed conditions on their commitments to the process. The DPRK requires economic and energy assistance from the other five parties; this is called the “disarmament-for-aid” agreement. The DPRK requires the

⁴ Charles L. “Jack” Pritchard, “Failed Diplomacy: The Tragic Story of How North Korea Got the Bomb,” book launch sponsored by Brookings CNAPS, the Korea Economic Institute, and the US-Korea Institute, July 17, 2007;

<http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/events/2007/0717north%20korea/20070717nkorea.pdf>.

⁵ Samuel S. Kim, “China’s conflict-management approach to the nuclear standoff on the Korean peninsula,” *Asian Perspective*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2006, p.36.

⁶ Although the implementation of the six-party agreements is undoubtedly more difficult than simply reaching those agreements, all the participating parties, including the DPRK, are moving forward with bargaining processes to carry out the agreements.

⁷ “Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, September 19, 2005; <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t212707.htm>.

⁸ “Initial Actions for the Implementation of the Joint Statement,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, February 13, 2007; <http://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/topics/fifth/t297463.htm>.

U.S. to change its “deep-rooted” “anti-DPRK” or “regime change” policy in order for North Korea to abandon its nuclear deterrent. The United States’s offers to North Korea include acknowledging North Korea’s sovereignty, providing energy assistance, removing North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism and lifting the Trading with the Enemy Act (Washington has already followed through on these two pledges), supporting North Korean membership in international and regional economic organizations, and normalizing diplomatic relations.

In addition to the individual merits of these actions, agreements, and promises, ad hoc arrangements may provide a feasible and pragmatic roadmap toward not only a nuclear-free Korean peninsula but also a cooperative security mechanism for Northeast Asia:

- The agreed rules of the Six-Party Talks might offer “the minimum conditions of coexistence” (in the words of Raymond Aron⁹) for former enemies and adversaries. The DPRK has already been treated as one party of the six-party process.
- Almost all the parties affected by the conflict in Northeast Asia have been included in the negotiations;
- With China’s mediation and facilitation, the DPRK and the U.S. have agreed to use diplomatic means to address the issue rather than economic sanctions and military confrontation;
- If carefully examined, all disputed issues address in the “joint statements” – including North Korea’s military and civilian nuclear programs, its nuclear cooperation with other countries or proliferation activities – have been raised in the Six-Party Talks;
- Agreements reached at the Six-Party Talks have largely reflected the current power relations (China and the DPRK still maintain a mutual assistance treaty; South Korea and Japan are America’s allies; China and the United States have a growing but “complex” cooperative relationship) in Northeast Asia;
- The negotiations have talked not only about the nuclear issue and other short-term problems, but have also touched on the future of regional security. Lead U.S. negotiator Christopher Hill said at Brookings, “The concept of the six-party approach is not just to deal with the nuclear issue or to deal with energy. It tries to deal with some of the underlying causes of tension in the region.” Regarding “the future relationship in the overall region,” Hill said the process “can look at overall problems in the region and can

⁹ Quoted by Andrew Hurrell in *On Global Order: Power, Values, and the Constitution of International Society*, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 2.

look ahead to see how we can begin or to strengthen multilateral processes in the region.”¹⁰

The “joint statements” can be regarded as founding documents for Northeast Asia’s long-term future. Some visionary parts of the “joint statements” can be fully developed and eventually included in a future regional charter for an enduring framework in Northeast Asia (like the Charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations¹¹ or the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe).

So perhaps the six parties have created a useful model through which difficult regional security problems can be solved multilaterally in the future. This model exhibits three essential characteristics:

- It is a step-by-step process. The Six-Party Talks have devoted (if not wasted) a lot of time to reaching agreements, and more time will be required to implement them. North Korea favors the step-by-step approach, and Chris Hill has also expressed and explained his support for a “phased manner” of solving the nuclear problem. Speaking at Brookings in February 2007, just after the second joint statement, Assistant Secretary Hill said, “we know the ultimate destination. And now we’re doing what I kind of had hoped to do in October of 2005, which is laying out a step by step process. And since we’re only doing very short steps, we move them a little place, and then we hope they say well, this is better than we were yesterday; let’s move on. And we’ll keep doing this and try to do it in a reasonable amount of time so that you know, we don’t all die of old age on the journey.”¹²
- The process is reciprocal and simultaneous. North Korea would abandon its nuclear weapons program completely, verifiably, and irreversibly if the others honor their commitments to provide complete, verifiable and irreversible security assurances and economic benefits. The parties have agreed to the so-called “action for action” principle.
- It is a substantially bilateral negotiating process (between the U.S. and North Korea) under an ad hoc multilateral framework. The two sides now conduct bilateral negotiations in both the Six-Party Talks and through other channels or mechanisms.

¹⁰ Christopher Hill, “Update on the Six-Party Talks,” discussion sponsored by Brookings CNAPS, the Korea Economic Institute, and the Asia Society, February 22, 2007;

<http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/events/2007/0222south%20korea/20070222hill.pdf>.

¹¹ Southeast Asia has already established its own charter. On November 20, 2007 in Singapore, the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) decided to establish its charter as “the legal and institutional framework for ASEAN.”

¹² Hill, “Update on the Six-Party Talks,” February 22, 2007.

Lessons

The process offer several lessons to observers. First, in Northeast Asia, many still do not fully acknowledge the basic fact of regional security interdependence. While America, the “sole superpower,” considers North Korea’s nuclear program a threat to Northeast Asian security, North Korea considers the program to be its defense against outside threats.¹³ In this light, the situation is a classic security dilemma. But the Six-Party Talks have reshaped the situation into a “mutual” or “common” security engagement. China has supported North Korea’s “reasonable security concerns” (and implored America to accept them) as a means of breaking the U.S.-North Korea deadlock, and the engagement by the U.S. and others in the Six-Party Talks shows that they have acknowledged North Korea’s security needs.

Second, the Korean denuclearization process requires support from and complementarity with other processes, such as inter-Korean relations. In an extremely complex geopolitical environment like Northeast Asia, the denuclearization process really needs support and coordination from a lot of other processes. Improving inter-Korean relations, specifically through the creation of a mutually acceptable peace process, and introducing a regional security mechanism are both crucial preliminary steps to achieving denuclearization. Without these additional considerations, North Korea surely will not have the confidence to give up its nuclear weapons. In the past, the “liberal” government in Seoul was eager to promote inter-Korean reconciliation, peaceful political coexistence and economic cooperation, and even attempted to institutionalize the Six-Party Talks. Today, however, the new government under President Lee Myung-bak seldom mentions the importance of an inter-Korean peace process and a regional security mechanism. Negotiating a peace treaty and establishing a security mechanism will probably be delayed by the newly troubled inter-Korean relations.

Third, China faces a “double risk” in its role in the U.S.-North Korea nuclear conflict: it must consider bilateral relations with both North Korea and the United States as it straddles the fence and tries to play the role of mediator.¹⁴ Initially, Beijing thought the Korean nuclear issue was not a security challenge to China and remained neutral in the second nuclear crisis which began in 2002. In some cases, the North was unhappy when China intervened in its talks with the United States on the nuclear issue. North Korea repeatedly insisted “the nuclear issue is an issue between the DPRK and the USA.” Pyongyang even warned China: “You’d better mind your own business. If you would want to get involved in the matter, please ask the United States to provide

¹³ Leonid Petrov, “President Lee Myung-bak’s North Korea policy: denuclearization or disengagement?” Nautilus Institute Policy Forum Online 08-025A: March 27, 2008.

¹⁴ This term is inspired by CNAPS Director Richard Bush.

security guarantees to the DPRK.”¹⁵ Early on, China agreed with the North’s stance, carefully distancing itself from the issue and playing no role in mediating DPRK-U.S.A negotiations.

But Washington asked China to play an active role in the talks in order to apply more pressure the DPRK. In addition to the obvious challenges of organizing and hosting such a sensitive multilateral negotiation, North Korea’s habit of playing the “China card” against the U.S. means that this role could easily harm China-U.S. relations. Over the past five years, although China perceived a nuclear challenge from North Korea¹⁶, it has had to maintain a careful balance between resolving the nuclear issue and preserving positive relations with North Korea. While playing a role in the Six-Party Talks, China continues to maintain, improve, and strengthen its engagement with the DPRK.

Finally, some real obstacles toward creating a nuclear-free Korean peninsula and developing a regional security mechanism still exist. For example:

- Achieving peaceful coexistence among the two Koreas and the United States is still difficult:
 - Trust between Washington and Pyongyang is relatively low, and Washington has been reluctant to meet its commitments (energy assistance and political recognition).
 - At the same time, America’s diplomatic approach to the nuclear issue has long faced criticism and resistance at home and abroad (for example, in Japan and South Korea).

¹⁵ Remarks by the DPRK Ambassador to China Choi Jin-su in 2003, quoted in Shen Jiru, “The urgent task of maintaining Northeast Asian security,” *World Economy and Politics (Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi)*, No. 9 (2003).

¹⁶ The Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China issued a statement on the nuclear test conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on October 9, 2006:

“The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) outrageously conducted a nuclear test on October 9th in defiance of unanimous opposition from the international community, and the Chinese government voices its firm opposition to the test. It is the Chinese government's unswerving and consistent position to enable the (Korean) Peninsula to go nuclear-free and oppose nuclear proliferation. The Chinese side strongly demands the DPRK side abide by its commitment to going nuclear free, halt all the activities that will possibly lead to the further deterioration of the situation and once again return to the track of the Six-Party Talks. The maintenance of peace and stability in the Northeast Asia region conforms to the common interests of all the parties concerned. The Chinese government appeals to all the parties concerned to respond calmly and persevere in settling the issue peacefully through consultations and dialogues. And the Chinese side will continue to make its unremitting efforts to this end.”

<http://www.chinaembassy.org.in/eng/fyrth/t275508.htm>.

- South Korea's new policy of "disengagement"¹⁷ toward North Korea might disturb the six-party process. Since the 2nd inter-Korean summit took place in October 2007, North Korea has watched angrily South Korea's political changes toward it. The new "conservative" government in Seoul formally ended the decade-long "sunshine" or "engagement" policy to North Korea, which the Lee Myung-bak administration asserted had failed. Since the decision not to continue this policy, South Korea's new role in the process cannot compare with its previous one.
- North Korea has suspended all of its dialogues with South Korea. Lee's policy may lead North Korea that threats to its security persist and that it should not abandon its nuclear weapons but keep them and slow down the process of denuclearization.¹⁸
- The South's decision to attach a human rights condition to its promises of aid may also prove counterproductive. More importantly, these ROK policy developments mean Seoul once again refuses to recognize the North's political status and is ready to see the collapse of the DPRK within the governing period of the Lee government.
- Japan always addresses its bilateral issues with North Korea at the Six-Party Talks. This is understandable but counterproductive to denuclearization efforts. North Korea's human rights abuses in general, and the abduction of Japanese citizens in particular, have dominated Japan's priorities in the Six-Party Talks.

The implementation of "joint statements"

Now the six-party process has entered into its substantive stage, implementing the agreements reached thus far. But big questions remain: How to implement the deals? How long will it take? Will other processes – peace and regional security mechanism talks – begin independent of denuclearization?

With the help of the six-party mechanism, implementation is already being carried out. Before more recent difficulties began, according to the U.S. State Department nuclear disablement was going well: "Eight out of eleven agreed disablement activities at the three core facilities have been completed. Work on disablement activities continues... These actions have halted the DPRK's ability to produce additional weapons-grade plutonium for its nuclear

¹⁷ Petrov, "President Lee Myung-bak's North Korea Policy: Denuclearization or Disengagement?"

¹⁸ Xinhua News Agency, "DPRK military said it is impossible to abandon nuclear deterrence in the current situation," June 9, Pyongyang, 2008.

weapons program.”¹⁹ North Korea’s submission of its nuclear declaration in June 2008 was a key step in the implementation process, but the U.S. was not satisfied with the submission and the process began to stall. The implementation is up to the parties’ actions, reactions and interactions (“action for action”). Unfortunately, there is no coercive and effective regional mechanism to monitor the implementation process.

Both the full contents of North Korea’s nuclear program and the details surrounding its nuclear cooperation with other countries continue to stymie the six-party process. Some in Washington believes Pyongyang has a uranium enrichment program or facility, but the DPRK insists otherwise. Washington wants to know more about the nuclear cooperation between the DPRK and Syria, but Pyongyang refuses to acknowledge the existence of such cooperation.

This persistent disagreement indicates an important possibility: Even if North Korea had made a satisfactory and acceptable declaration of its nuclear program and Washington fulfilled its commitment to remove North Korea from its “list of state sponsors of terror” and the “Trading with the Enemy Act” in a timely manner, the political will which motivates the parties’ decisions may be not adequate. Verifying North Korea’s nuclear report may be time consuming. If the verification process drags on, cooperation between North Korea and the U.S. will become more uncertain.

Before implementation is complete, North Korea will be a de facto nuclear state

How long will denuclearization take? Before the realization of a disabled and denuclearized Korean Peninsula, is the U.S. and the region ready to tolerate or coexist with a temporarily (in theory and in principle according to the “joint statements”) nuclear armed North Korea? In all likelihood, the DPRK will be a de facto nuclear weapon state for a longer time if relations between North Korea and the others deteriorate, and denuclearization stalls. One scenario is that within the next five years (until 2013), the region would have to live with a North Korea that possesses nuclear weapons.

The consequences of a de facto nuclear North Korea are serious. So long as nuclear weapons exist in the DPRK, poor management of North-South relations could lead to military tensions, which would always include a possibility of the ultimate escalation. People have reason to be concerned about the ways and means of North Korea’s nuclear weapons management. The chance of a nuclear accident in North Korea should not be ruled out, and the United States and the other member countries of the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) may continue to argue the

¹⁹ The U.S. Department of State report on the developments in the Six-Party Talks process, May 9, 2008.

<http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/08039USDOS.html>.

“risk of proliferation – through North Korea’s sale of nuclear material or a nuclear weapon to rogue states or terrorist groups” exists.²⁰

2. Negotiating beyond denuclearization and letting a security multilateralism work in Northeast Asia

What does “a regional security mechanism” in Northeast Asia mean?

The meaning of such a regional mechanism has not been well-defined or discussed. Clearly, despite the existing official and unofficial discussions on the issue, it will probably be difficult to achieve an agreement on its style and substance. Chris Hill supports the creation of such a mechanism, but recognizes the difficulty in defining it: “[W]hether it looks like the OSCE, whether it looks like some other institution from some other part of the world, will depend on the participants, I would say. We at this point cannot say with any precision what it would look like, but North Korea could be one of the founding members of this Northeast Asia peace and security mechanism.”²¹ The idea of a Northeast Asian version of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which played a positive role in ending the Cold War in Europe, is gaining currency among some of the six parties. A leading and sophisticated American view is expressed by James Goodby: “The Six-Party Talks on North Korea’s nuclear weapons program could rank in importance with the creation of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe... The CSCE/OSCE obviously is not a blueprint for other regions to copy. But it should be noted that it was: an agreement successfully concluded despite very different motivations and interests among the major negotiating partners.”²²

But today’s North Korea is not yesterday’s Soviet Union and Northeast Asia is not Europe. The differences go beyond the geographical and geopolitical disparities. The Cold War has been over for most of Northeast Asia for many years (except for the Korean peninsula, of course). The extent of economic, security, and human interdependence among countries and peoples is significant and deepening (except for North Korea). Today’s Asia faces a fundamentally different security situation from yesterday’s Europe. There are new security issues which either did not emerge or were unimportant during the Cold War, the most pressing of which are energy insecurity and climate change. I believe that an OSCE-style regional

²⁰ James Goodby and Jack Merritt, Co-Chairs, “A Framework for Peace and Security in Korea and Northeast Asia,” Policy Paper of the Atlantic Council of the United States, April 2007, p. 9;

http://www.acus.org/files/publication_pdfs/1/070413-North_Korea_Working_Group_Report.pdf.

²¹ Christopher R. Hill, Global Leadership Speaker Series of the Atlantic Council of the United States, March 25, 2008; <http://www.acus.org/docs/Chris-Hill-20080324-TRANSCRIPT.htm>.

²² James Goodby, “The Emerging architecture for security and cooperation in Northeast Asia”, *Issues and Insights*, Pacific Forum CSIS, Vol. 8-No. 3, 2008.

mechanism is too conservative for Northeast Asia. It is no longer enough to meet the regional countries' security needs. In practice, the six-party process itself and its idea of a regional mechanism are much bolder than the idea of a Northeast Asian OSCE. Although Northeast Asia in particular and Asia in general should to create an original regional security mechanism (rather than replicate another model), Northeast Asia can learn some valuable lessons from the success of the OSCE. A new regional framework in Asia should be:

- *based on the successful settlement of the Korean nuclear issue*: but before a nuclear settlement can be reached, the six nations need to build a shared political will to build the mechanism;
- *open and inclusive*: this alludes not only to the DPRK but to others who are not members of the U.S.-centered alliance system in the region. The DPRK should definitely be included in the new regional mechanism, which should also help forge a new relationship between China and the U.S.-led alliance system.
- *able to assist in reorganizing and reinforcing pre-existing regional security mechanisms such as ASEAN and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*: the goal would ultimately develop an Asia-Pacific Security Community that includes nations and regions outside the six-party process.

Regional security challenges and common interests

Denuclearization of the Korean peninsula is just one of the big security challenges facing Northeast Asia. We can identify a long list of common tasks in Northeast Asia:

- If denuclearizing stalls for an extended period of time, an internationally unrecognized and unaccepted North Korean nuclear state might suffer crises such as further economic failure, or what Thomas L. McNaugher of the RAND Corporation calls “discontinuities.”²³ The above-mentioned possible mismanagement of its nuclear arsenal is also a concern.²⁴
- Inspiring multilateral cooperation around “contain[ing] the possibility of North Korean sales of nuclear materials to terrorists” and “undercut[ting] the logic of a possible nuclear arms race that might include Japan or South Korea - or even Taiwan.”²⁵

²³ Thomas L. McNaugher, “Multilateral security arrangements in Northeast Asia: choosing the right direction,” paper presented in the tenth conference between China Reform Forum and the Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, September 5, 2007.

²⁴ Zhang Liangui, “Coping with a Nuclear North Korea,” *China Security*, Autumn 2006; http://www.wsichina.org/back4_01.html.

²⁵ Peter Van Ness, “Australia and Regional Cooperation in Northeast Asia: From Hegemony to a Multilateral Security Mechanism?” Australia Policy Forum 07-11A, 17 May 2007.

- If denuclearization is successful the region will be faced with the challenge of maintaining and consolidating that success.
- Full regional engagement with the DPRK: allowing North Korea to integrate into existing regional institutions including the ASEAN-led regional cooperation including the East Asia Summit.
- Full international engagement with the DPRK: coordinating with international financial institutions to facilitate North Korea's domestic transformation (such as market-oriented economic reform, the development of energy and food supplies).
- Korean peace settlement: facilitating international negotiation for the formal end of "the forgotten war" on the Korean peninsula.
- Preparing the region for either the "discontinuity" or "reunification" trend that occurs after the resolution of conflict on the Korean peninsula.
- Addressing "soft security" or "non-traditional security" challenges, such as energy and food insecurity as well as climate change and environmental concerns in the region.

Even the most powerful countries are unlikely to be able to deal with such daunting overlapping and long-term challenges unilaterally or even bilaterally. Regional cooperation is the inevitable best option.

When should the six parties establish such a regional mechanism to face these near-term and long-term challenges, before or after the denuclearization of North Korea? Although denuclearization is seen by many as a strict precondition for a regional mechanism, I strongly favor the former. If we wait for the complete success of the Six-Party Talks, in the foreseeable future, we will continue to have no regional mechanism. Further, the success or completion of the Six-Party Talks may provide a good excuse for opponents of a regional mechanism to refuse to support it. Some who are against such a regional institution persist either America-led regional alliance system or bilateralism such as big power frameworks is still able to manage the regional challenges.

The role of the Six-Party Talks in building a new regional security mechanism

Northeast Asia has always lacked a stable and effective multilateral security arrangement among governments, and has been perceived largely – but incorrectly – as a region still divided by the heritage of the Cold War. Before the birth of the Six-Party Talks, many realists and ideologues were pessimistic about the possible emergence of a common Northeast Asian security architecture. But the idea of a Northeast Asian security mechanism is really not new. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev proposed it in 1986 and 1988, just before the end of the Cold War.²⁶ Other optimists have also hoped for and argued the necessity and possibility of this regional idea.

²⁶ Charles L. Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy*, p. 171.

As an indication of common political willingness, governments and foreign ministries of the six nations can declare that the current six-party process is the first step toward a permanent regional security mechanism, and then attempt to build a more formal and regular one to replace the Six-Party Talks. Assuming Pyongyang continues to implement the six-party agreements, institutionalizing the Six-Party Talks as a regional security mechanism would expedite North Korea's integration into the region, as Pyongyang would have negotiated, accepted, and implemented the rules of the organization. In addition to helping ensure North Korea's compliance, the formalization of this established but still ad hoc process would also limit the opportunities for North Korea to play one actor against another (and it would reduce conflict among the other parties, exclusive of North Korea).

Therefore, as soon as the momentum of implementing the six-party agreements returns, as it is expected to, the Six-Party Talks should be institutionalized as soon as possible. One way to institutionalize the Six-Party Talks is simply to regularize future rounds in order to formally conduct multilateral comprehensive nuclear talks between Pyongyang and the other five parties. So far, six rounds of the Six-Party Talks have occurred on an irregular basis; after each round either "nobody knows" what time the next round would occur, or the planned next round was delayed by concrete disputes among the parties. Generally, when denuclearization encountered difficulties (such as the "delay" or the warning of "would-lose-patience"), China pushed for resumption of the talks at the request of other parties. Another way to institutionalize the process is to have the first meeting of foreign ministers – with the express purpose of discussing a future mechanism – as soon as possible.

The transformation of the Korean Armistice Agreement

The "Joint Statements" of September 19, 2005 and February 13, 2007 repeatedly state: "The directly related parties will negotiate a permanent peace regime on the Korean peninsula at an appropriate separate forum." This agreement should be respected by all participating parties.

A replacement of the existing Korean Armistice Agreement with a peace treaty can be seen both as a necessary security assurance to the DPRK before denuclearization can be achieved, and as another positive step toward a regional security community

The Korean War ended in July 1953 with an armistice agreement, rather than a formal peace treaty. The two Koreas still remain in principle at war with each other. The parties involved in the war paid a heavy cost. After many negotiations, on July 27, 1953, the Korean People's Army and the Chinese People's Volunteers signed the Korean War Armistice Agreement with the "United Nations Command," "in the interest of stopping the Korean conflict, with its great toil of suffering and bloodshed on both sides, and with the objective of establishing an armistice which

will insure a complete cessation of hostilities and of all acts of armed force in Korea until a final peaceful settlement is achieved.”²⁷

From the U.S. perspective, the proposed “peace treaty” mentioned at the Six-Party Talks and elsewhere was seen as an “incentive” for engaging with North Korea. On November 17, 2005, U.S. President Bush and ROK President Roh Moo-hyun discussed the transformation of the Armistice Agreement to a peace regime at a bilateral sideline meeting during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Busan, South Korea. When discussions resumed on November 20, 2006, in Hanoi (again at the APEC summit), President Bush stated for the first time that the U.S., as a signatory to the armistice, was willing to declare the formal end to the war and establish a peace treaty (“the formal termination of the Korean War”) if North Korea abandons its nuclear weapons program. White House spokesman Tony Snow said the U.S. might agree to “the end of the Korean War and moving forward on economic cooperation, cultural, educational and other ties”²⁸ in return for North Korea’s nuclear abandonment. In September 2007, Roh continued to press Bush to end the Armistice, and Bush reiterated his government’s position: “We look forward to the day when we can end the Korean War. That will end — will happen when Kim Jong-Il verifiably gets rid of his weapons programs and his weapons.”²⁹ Chris Hill later expanded on this, saying, “the treaty and other incentives for Pyongyang hinge on the DPRK denuclearization,” and, “there was no reason why the negotiation could not begin.”³⁰

However, from Pyongyang’s perspective, the “peace treaty” is an instrument for “eliminating the military confrontation on the peninsula” and “solving the problem of establishing mutual trust between the DPRK and the U.S.”³¹ and should be established prior to denuclearization. In July 2005, a DPRK Foreign Ministry spokesman claimed, “The transformation means a fundamental reason of the nuclear issue – America’s hostility to North Korea and its nuclear threat [to the North] – disappear, thus it is possible for North Korea to

²⁷ The English text of the Korean War Armistice Agreement, Panmunjom, Korea, July 27, 1953; http://www.nautilus.org/DPRKBriefingBook/agreements/CanKor_VTK_1953_07_27_korean_armistice_agreement.pdf.

²⁸ “Roh, Bush discussed Korean peninsula peace treaty at Hanoi summit: Official,” Korea.net, http://www.korea.net/news/issues/issueDetailView.asp?board_no=14264&menu_code=A.

²⁹ “What Roh Actually Said to Bush in Sydney,” <http://www.dprkstudies.org/2007/09/08/what-roh-actually-said-to-bush-in-sydney/>.

³⁰ Yonhap News Agency, “U.S. envoy reaffirms Korean peace talks would start within this year,” October 30, 2007; http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-33322055_ITM.

³¹ From an editorial in the DPRK’s official newspaper, Rodong Sinmun, quoted from the People’s Daily, “DPRK urges the United States replace the armistice agreement with a peace agreement,” January 3, 2007.

denuclearize.” He also said, “all in all, establishment of the peace regime is the necessary precondition to the Korean denuclearization.”³²

Legally, the signatory parties of the Armistice Agreement are the DPRK and China on one side, and the “United Nations Command” on the other. They are, of course, the real “directly involved parties.” But politically, the exclusion of South Korea as a party runs contrary to the facts surrounding the Korean conflict. Although South Korea didn’t sign the pact as an independent party, it remains involved as a warring party, an implementer of the armistice, and surely a de facto party of the future peace treaty. America’s responsibility in the war should be made clear as well. The U.S. organized and led (and continues to lead) the UN Command and is the only foreign country with troops remaining on the peninsula.

As a political issue, the negotiation of a peace treaty on the peninsula should be included as part of the solution to the nuclear issue. Unfortunately, the declaration issued by the two Koreas on October 4, 2007 controversially hinted that China may be excluded from participation in future treaty negotiations, and therefore may have lessened the possibility of Chinese participation in eventual Korean peninsula peace talks, and this could inhibit the process.

The relationship between the Northeast Asian regional security mechanism and existing regional multilateral mechanisms

Except for its bilateral nuclear negotiations with the United States (within the framework of the Six-Party Talks), North Korea has talked little about the issue bilaterally with Japan and South Korea, although these parties have tried to address the issue in their relations with North Korea. These Northeast Asian countries have instead had no choice but to engage North Korea through the United States and its multilateral mechanism.

Currently, ASEAN is Asia’s leading regional security mechanism. It is the only sub-regional organization which has ambitiously and boldly declared to be a sub-regional community (the ASEAN Security Community, the ASEAN Economic Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community).³³ Since the mid-1990s, ASEAN has addressed broad regional security issues in Northeast Asia. On the Korean nuclear issue, ASEAN has played a useful engagement role. Through ASEAN and ASEAN-initiated mechanisms, Southeast Asian countries have repeatedly expressed common concern about Korean nuclear development, calling on North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons program for the sake of East Asian regional peace, security, and prosperity. The DPRK participated in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)

³² Quote from a paper presented by Yu Meihua, Director, Center for Korean Peninsula Peace Studies, at a conference in Beijing, September 5, 2007.

³³ See the *Charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations*, Singapore, November 20, 2007.

process as a dialogue member in 2000 for the first time. By organizing and hosting the ARF, ASEAN has helped improve relations between the United States and the DPRK. In July 2008, North Korea signed ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC).³⁴ Pyongyang endorses the peace and regional cooperation norms the ASEAN has pursued.³⁵

The ASEAN Plus Three (APT), or its extension the East Asia Summit (EAS), is mainly a form of economic regionalism in East Asia, but it has plenty of security implications for the region: (1) the theoretical "East Asian Community" consisting of the 10 Southeast Asian nations and, initially, three Northeast Asian nations, includes a clear and growing security component; most East Asian countries don't want to jointly contain China but instead to cooperate with China; (2) China's regional importance has been endorsed by ASEAN, and China-Japan interaction has increased as a result of ASEAN. So, ASEAN helps China and Japan, and a dynamic and virtuous interaction between ASEAN, China, and Japan has been established;³⁶ and (3) deepened regional economic cooperation among East Asian countries has actually reduced security tensions and suspicions among them.

Since 2003, under the APT mechanism, the Northeast Asia three (China, Japan, and South Korea) have maintained ongoing consultation and coordination over the DPRK nuclear issue. The leaders of China, Japan and South Korea began to experiment with a trilateral cooperation mechanism in the "10+3" Summit in 1999, before the current crisis began. In 2003, at the same occasion, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun issued a "joint declaration to promote trilateral cooperation among three Northeast Asian countries." The following year, the foreign ministers of the three countries issued a "trilateral action strategy" to implement the declaration. The trilateral mechanism logically and naturally addressed the North Korea nuclear issue and the importance of the Six-Party Talks: "The three countries will promote close consultations and cooperation for the peaceful denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula through the Six-Party Talks, while addressing the nuclear issue and the related concerns of the Parties and working together to maintain peace

³⁴ "ASEAN Regional Forum: North Korea signs ASEAN non-aggression pact," AseanAffairs.com, July 25, 2008; http://www.aseanaffairs.com/page/n_korea_signs_asean_non-aggression_pact.

³⁵ Singaporean Foreign Minister George Yong-Boon Yeo visited the DPRK on mid-May, 2008. Han Yunhong, "The DPRK considers to join the TAC", Lian He Zao Bao, the Singapore's major Chinese newspaper, May 15, 2008.

³⁶ Pang, Zhongying, "A comment on the first ASEAN-Japan Summit, 2003," <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/guojij/1030/2240194.html>.

and stability on the peninsula. They will further strengthen close coordination to expeditiously achieve substantive progress at the Six-Party Talks.”³⁷

In 2007-08, as a result of improvements in China-Japan and South Korea-Japan relations, the concept of trilateral coordination and cooperation was once again discussed and implemented. The second trilateral foreign ministerial meeting in Japan decided to hold the first trilateral summit outside the ASEAN framework in September 2008. Amid the accelerating financial crisis in December 2008, at the first independent tripartite summit, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso, and South Korean President Lee Myung-bak signed a joint statement on trilateral partnership in Japan’s Fukuoka. Such trilateral summits will be held annually and regularly in the future. However, this trilateral mechanism is still weak and inadequate, serving only to promote economic cooperation (free trade negotiations or cooperation in dealing with financial turmoil³⁸) and resolve other “soft security” issues such as natural disaster response. Coordination on the Six-Party Talks is a new goal of the three way cooperation among China, Japan and South Korea.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (the SCO, consisting of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) was originally a sub-regional security mechanism focused on part of the former Soviet Union and called the “Shanghai Five” (Uzbekistan joined later). But the organization has moved steadily toward regional economic cooperation. Many other non-SCO countries have shown interest in engaging or using the SCO, and India, Iran, Mongolia, and Pakistan have become observers of the organization. For various reasons, Japan, the EU, and the U.S. have also shown interest in the organization.

The trend toward various forms of regional cooperation in Asia continues. Promoting the creation of a regional community (mainly in economic terms but including security implications) in East Asia has been a relatively positive component of China-Japan relations. As part of their newly agreed “strategic reciprocal relations,” the two reaffirmed their common interest in regional cooperation or even integration. As its influence and reach in Asia continue to rise, India also seeks an “open and inclusive (regional) architecture, which is flexible enough to accommodate the great diversity which exists in Asia.”³⁹ Based on this increasing trend toward regionalism, some challenging questions are:

³⁷ “The Action Strategy on Trilateral Cooperation Among the People’s Republic of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of Korea, December 21, 2004; <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zjzg/yzs/dqzzywt/t175827.htm>.

³⁸ In the December 13, 2008 summit in Fukuoka, leaders of China, Japan and South Korea also signed a joint declaration for deepening regional cooperation against the financial crisis.

³⁹ India’s External Affairs Minister Shri Pranab Mukherjee, “India’s Foreign Policy Today,” Peking University, Beijing, China, June 06, 2008.

- How to coordinate/harmonize existing regional mechanisms?
- How to overcome overlapping regional mechanisms?
- How to promote dialogue and cooperation among these regional mechanisms?

This paper argues that a regional mechanism based on the Six-Party Talks can play an organizing role and enable better coordination among regional institutions. If some ASEAN and possibly Australia were included, it could be a more inclusive regional body – it would be an ideal main security multilateral architecture for the Asia-Pacific.

Relations between the Northeast Asian regional security mechanism, the existing U.S.-led bilateral alliance system, and the “trans-Pacific” paradigms

The United States is still not a member of the SCO, ASEAN Plus Three (APT), or even the East Asia Summit (EAS). Although it has been paying close attention to these regional groupings, Washington’s attitude is contradictory. On the one hand, America has expressed concerns about the impact of these groupings on America’s interests and influence in Asia. Also, Washington nipped some truly regional ideas in the bud (for example, ideas such as the “East Asian Economic Community” which was raised by Malaysia or the “Asian Monetary Fund” suggested by Japan in the late 1990s). But despite this apparent concern, under the Bush administration the U.S. showed relatively little interest in joining these Asian regional institutions. One of the basic reasons for its disinterest is that the U.S. still believes its power is solidified through its extensive military and economic presence and alliances with leading powers such as Japan. The other reason is that the U.S. wants to revitalize old frameworks such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) to deal with Asia-centered regional plans.

The U.S. has been using its bilateral treaty-based alliance (or “hub and spokes”) system to deal with regional issues and problems. But increasingly, the U.S. has come to realize it “will not be well-served over the medium to long term by maintaining a bilateral military structure in Asia.”⁴⁰ So, pragmatically, for “problem-solving,” America’s attitude toward regional mechanisms has to change to serve its interests. America’s utilization of the Six-Party Talks fully demonstrates this strategy. America may begin “a new era of diplomacy” in Southeast Asia,⁴¹ but this will take time.

⁴⁰ Nick Bisley, “Asian security architecture,” in Ashley Tellis and Michael Wills (eds) *Strategic Asia, 2007-08: Domestic Political Change and Grand Strategy*, Seattle, WA: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2007.

⁴¹ See “Beginning a New Era of Diplomacy in Asia: Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton’s Remarks With ASEAN Secretary General Dr. Surin Pitsuwan,” U.S. Department of State, February 18, 2009, www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/02/119422.htm.

There are opportunities to solve the contradiction the U.S. has faced: a regional mechanism based on the Six-Party Talks could operate under American leadership and still serve as a regional mechanism. This could help relieve America's worries about the trend of Asia-centered regional economic-security groupings. Furthermore, it could provide an opportunity to forge deeper security cooperation between Asian powers not allied or aligned with the U.S.

So, if the Six-Party Talks finally becomes a regional security mechanism, "tensions" between the U.S.-led alliance system and regional mechanisms⁴² could be reduced or avoided.

But a more negative interpretation of the U.S.'s seemingly contradictory approach is that Washington hopes for regional institutions to remain relatively weak and ineffective. Under this interpretation, the United States could perceive that a regional mechanism in Northeast Asia or more broadly in Asia and the Pacific could form the "regional security architecture" needed to limit the rising regionalism in Asia. As a matter of fact, there has been real tension between America's "trans-Pacific" arrangements and the burgeoning Asia-based or Asia-initiated efforts at regionalism which either excluded the U.S. or was designed against it (in trade and investment terms). In the 1990s, some East Asian countries such as Malaysia and Japan wanted to unite their voices in world economic (trade) negotiations and proposed early forms of regionalism. But the U.S. simply opposed them. Since then, the U.S. has been uneasy with the development of East Asian regionalism under the ASEAN regional processes. As a means of dealing with Asian regionalism, the U.S. has stressed the importance of revitalizing APEC for economic issues⁴³ and the ARF for security issues,⁴⁴ while maintaining other "trans-Pacific" mechanisms. To the U.S., the Six-Party Talks (and a possible regional security mechanism based on the talks) could be a new way to contain Asian regionalism.

It is both wishful and incorrect thinking to believe that the repeatedly fortified American-South Korean and American-Japanese alliances in East Asia will or would be transformed by the creation of a regional security mechanism in Asia. American officials have made clear that the proposed regional security organization in Northeast Asia based on the

⁴² Sheila Smith, "Assessing the Six Party Talks in NE Asia: Some Relationships Flourish, Others Suffer," seminar remarks at KORUS House in Washington, May 22, 2008;

http://www.dynamic-korea.com/korus_house/kh_view_news.php?main=KHF&sub=&uid=200800232641&keyword=.

⁴³ America proposed a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) at the APEC summit in Sydney in 2007.

⁴⁴ But, Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was absent from the ASEAN Regional Forum twice.

See, www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/02/119422.htm.

Pang Zhongying

The Six-Party Process, Regional Security Mechanisms, and U.S.-China Cooperation
CNAPS Visiting Fellow Working Paper

Six-Party Talks is no more than a multilateral “forum” or “dialogue.” Through its bilateral relationships and alliances, Washington repeatedly claims the U.S. “will remain enduring and indispensable to the region’s prosperity and stability.”⁴⁵ The regional security arrangement would just complement or reinforce the existing America-centered alliance system.

3. China-U.S. security cooperation on the DPRK issue and its implications

China’s bilateral and regional approach to the DPRK

China’s ties with the DPRK during the Korean War and the Cold War are well known. Even as it leads the Six-Party Talks, China continues to renew and transform these ties. China’s official policy toward the DPRK is summarized in 16 characters:

继承传统，面向未来，睦邻友好，加强合作

“inherit traditions, face the future, be good neighbors, and strengthen cooperation.”

China repeatedly says it will continue to abide by the terms of the nearly 50 year-old Chinese-Korean Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance with the DPRK,⁴⁶ which was formally signed in 1961. But beyond the surface of this bilateral relationship, China has been exploring a new policy toward the DPRK in order to adapt to changes in North Korea, the Korean peninsula, Northeast Asia, and the rest of the world. Many big and historic events have taken place since the treaty was established: the Cold War in Asia is over; China and the U.S. have minimized their differences and competition, and maximized their common interests and cooperation; China established diplomatic relations with South Korea in 1992; and China, the U.S., Japan, and South Korea have developed important trade and investment partnerships.

For reasons of both geo-strategic stability and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, China has to respond to the nuclear issue. A nuclear North Korea is China’s fourth nuclear weapons neighbor (after Russia, India, and Pakistan) and would add another dimension to the regional strategic environment. The advent of a nuclear North Korea paired with China’s growing role in the Six-Party Talks has gradually transformed China-North Korea relations. While China has seemingly maintained ties with North Korea, the relationship is being transformed from “unusual” or “special” to “normal,” like many of China’s other state-to-state relations in Asia. (Note also that North Korea is pursuing – or claims to be pursuing – “normalized” relations with the United States. Such a development would in itself be of strategic interest to China. Combined with the “normalization” of China-DPRK relations, it is also

⁴⁵ Christopher R. Hill, “East Asia momentum,” *Caijing* (English edition), January 2008.

⁴⁶ Although, in recent years, some Chinese scholars have proposed that the treaty should be revised or even expired.

evidence of North Korea's trend toward normalizing its foreign relations in general.) In order to understand China's evolving DPRK policy, I address the following two aspects.

1. Bilaterally, China continues to consolidate its (ruling political) party-to-party and state-to-state relations with the DPRK. China carefully respects North Korea's sovereignty.
 - China maintains official engagement with North Korea and continues "high-level" mutual visits. In the new century, China's leaders have visited Pyongyang frequently. President Hu Jintao formally visited DPRK in 2005, for the first time. In his first foreign trip since becoming China's vice president, Xi Jinping paid a goodwill visit to the DPRK in June 2008. The DPRK top leaders have also visited China frequently.
 - China develops economic cooperation with the DPRK as the DPRK reforms its economy. The new economic relationship is gradually becoming market-oriented and mutually beneficial, although China is still a major provider of official assistance.
 - No doubt, the changing bilateral economic relationship between China and North Korea is a major force for "normalization" of China-North Korea relations. At the same time, by developing economic relations with China, North Korea also is entering into the world's largest "emerging market."

2. China's engagement with North Korea now incorporates more multilateral and international channels and mechanisms.
 - Among these, the six-party mechanism is most important. China-North Korea interaction in the six-party process shows that China is beginning to consider regional and international viewpoints toward the DPRK.
 - Regional stability is the number one goal of China's involvement in the Six-Party Talks. By helping solve the nuclear conflict, China hopes to stabilize the region.
 - Furthermore, China has encouraged and supported regional efforts to engage North Korea on the one hand and, on the other hand, has cooperated with regional powers and stakeholders such as South Korea, Japan, and ASEAN on the nuclear issue and beyond.

America's praise for China's cooperation

In the Six-Party Talks, praise has been an effective negotiating tool for the U.S. in dealing with either its partner (China) or its adversary (the DPRK).

At the beginning of the second North Korea nuclear crisis, in 2002-2003, the Bush administration refused to “talk with America’s enemies” (including North Korea) over the nuclear issue, but alternatively wanted to take a multilateral approach to North Korea. How did it do so? Washington sought (and received) China’s collaboration, which was believed in the United States to have powerful “influence” or “leverage” on North Korea. For example, “During a stop in China en route to the inauguration of ROK president Roh Moo-Hyun in February 2003, Secretary Powell suggested that Beijing would be well-positioned to organize and host multilateral talks involving the United States, China, Japan, and North and South Korea. Powell developed the idea after hearing a proposal to have Tokyo convene a multiparty dialogue in Japan with the United States as an observer; while he found merit in the idea of convening multilateral talks in Asia, he knew that Beijing was a more appropriate host and that the United States would join only as a full participant.”⁴⁷ Since then, China has played a key role in the organization of the talks. Many U.S. leaders, officials and politicians have repeatedly praised and encouraged China’s role in the process.

Since the Six-Party Talks began, China has supported U.S.-initiated UN Security Council sanctions against North Korea (one on North Korea’s missile tests and the other on North Korea’s nuclear test). Thomas Christensen, American deputy assistant secretary of state, stated in 2008 that “China has supported an unprecedented number of key U.S. foreign policy initiatives in the United Nations Security Council, including sanctions against North Korea... We continue to consult closely with the Chinese to urge North Korea to comply with its commitments under the October 3rd “Second Phase Actions for the Implementation of the Joint Statement,” including a complete and correct declaration of its nuclear programs.”⁴⁸

As the Six-Party Talks made progress in 2007 and early 2008, the U.S. realized that praise might be an effective negotiating tool in encouraging and leveraging sustained cooperation from China. To China, praise from Washington is an important affirmation of China’s constructive and cooperative role in world affairs. China wants to strengthen its relations with the U.S. by pursuing shared interests such as a nuclear-free Korean peninsula.

The limits of Chinese-American security cooperation

While China-U.S. cooperation has enabled unprecedented problem-solving, some in Washington and East Asia worry about China-U.S. cooperation over the DPRK. Some are uneasy

⁴⁷ Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy*, p.57.

⁴⁸ Thomas J. Christensen, “Shaping China’s global choices through diplomacy,” Statement before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, March 18, 2008; http://www.uscc.gov/hearings/2008hearings/written_testimonies/08_03_18_wrts/08_03_18_christensen_statement.php?action=sept08.

about the strengthened cooperation on a security issue, mainly because they view geopolitics from a zero-sum perspective. “Japan-U.S. relations have suffered as a result through the experience of the Six Party Talks, especially in the last year, while China-US relations have strengthened,” according to the American Japan expert Sheila Smith. “Tokyo has become increasingly pessimistic and concerned over a lack of coordination with Washington regarding North Korea, but Beijing has remained optimistic, strengthening communication with Washington while also finding common ground on North Korea.”⁴⁹

This deep-rooted balance of power in general and the necessity of dealing with “the rise of China” in particular leads to more speculation about eventual outcomes. Given the strategic importance of the Korean peninsula, “Washington could lose an enemy and gain a neutral North Korea – if not a friend or an ally – as a counterbalance against China and a revived Russia, and as a check on Japan’s future course.”⁵⁰ This may explain why the U.S. began to attempt to engage North Korea.

In terms of both interests and values, China’s alliance and relationship with North Korea has long been a point of conflict in China-United States relations. No doubt, China’s helpful hosting of the Six-Party Talks has contributed to the stability of China-US relations. Since the end of the Cold War, China has sought “strategic”⁵¹ and “stable” relations with the U.S.⁵² In theory, the Korean nuclear issue presented an opportunity for real strategic interaction between the United States and China, but China’s offering to the U.S. has still produced less strategic value for their relationship. I attribute this to the following: (1) China’s “influence” on North Korea was not as big as policymakers in the United States believed; in fact, due to problems between the DPRK and China, it is relatively limited; (2) even if China actually has significant influence on North Korea, it is difficult to use because China does not want to put its relationship with North Korea at risk. China’s organization of the Six-Party Talks and supportive role in the UN Security Council were harmful to its relations with North Korea. It is said that North Korea’s nuclear test was retaliation against China for pressuring it; indeed, some Chinese analysts believe that “China is the biggest loser with a nuclear North Korea.”⁵³ If Pyongyang really retaliated, China would pay a massive geopolitical price. Bearing in mind the vulnerability of Chinese-North Korean relations, along with the Six-Party Talks, China has been doing many things to strengthen its

⁴⁹ Sheila Smith, “Assessing the Six Party Talks in NE Asia: Some Relationships Flourish, Others Suffer.”

⁵⁰ Bruce Cumings, “Kim Jong Il confronts Bush — and wins. A New Page in North-South Korean Relations,” Japan Focus, <http://japanfocus.org/products/details/2539>.

⁵¹ This is highlighted in the naming conventions of a management mechanism for Sino-U.S. relations which the Chinese side refers to as the “Strategic Dialogue,” and which Americans refer to as the “Senior Dialogue” (not to be confused with the “Strategic Economic Dialogue”).

⁵² Wang Jisi, “China’s search for stability with America,” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2005.

⁵³ Zhang Liangui, “Coping with a Nuclear NK,” *China Security*, Autumn 2006, p. 12.

relations with North Korea as noted above; and. (3) as the U.S. resumed direct dialogue with the DPRK, possibly, Washington demanded less cooperation from China and attached less importance to the Six-Party Talks.

Many in the U.S. argue that the Korean nuclear issue is not only America's challenge or problem but also China's, recognizing that "China also has a strong self-interest in preventing the emergence of another nuclear weapon state on its border."⁵⁴ But still, many Americans don't think that six-party cooperation with Beijing would lift the level of China-U.S. cooperation further, and they show little confidence. Americans repeatedly remind their Chinese interlocutors that, as a "responsible stakeholder" in the region, China should consider dealing with a nuclear Korea one of its responsibilities. America's ad hoc multilateral approach toward problems like the Korea nuclear issue under the Bush administration does not necessarily indicate that that administration genuinely supported multilateralism. In dealing with North Korea, America has had no better choice but to depend on China to organize the diplomatic process.

Some in Washington still believe the United States can disarm North Korea by the use of "sticks" rather than "carrots."⁵⁵ This notion may cost America more opportunities to implement deals that it may reach with North Korea under the Six-Party Talks. The end of the Six-Party Talks would mean the end of a nuclear deal with North Korea. It would also deal a serious blow to China-U.S. security cooperation.

The future of China-U.S. cooperation in Northeast Asia

Close China-U.S. cooperation in the ad hoc process is already established, but this cooperation has not yet reached its destination of denuclearization and other agreed upon items. Without a doubt, there are years to go. The future of this cooperation will be decided or affected by the following factors:

- The first is the fate of the Six-Party Talks. Unsurprisingly, the process has been viewed with skepticism, criticism and pessimism by observers across Northeast Asia and the United States. A positive and sustained six-party process could continue to boost China-U.S. security cooperation. China has repeatedly expressed hope that the talks will be maintained. But if the talks unfortunately end, China and the U.S. will lose a constructive platform of security communication and cooperation.

⁵⁴ *A Framework for Peace and Security in Korea and Northeast Asia*, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Jay P. Lefkowitz, Speech at "The North Korean Problem: Toward a Diplomatic Solution in 2008?" the AEI, January 17, 2008; available at http://www.aei.org/events/eventID.1635.filter.all/event_detail.asp.

- The second is the development of the DPRK. Since the end of the Cold War many scholars and researchers, particularly in the U.S., have derived sophisticated conjectures and predictions about North Korea's political, economic, ideological, and military systems. But different countries have formulated different responses to difficulties emanating from North Korea. With converging rather than diverging views and policies, China and the U.S. can discuss how to jointly face North Korea's future.
- The third is the policy of the new Obama administration toward the Korean peninsula in general and North Korea in particular. If President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton really want to practice a new policy toward North Korea, there may be a historic breakthrough between Pyongyang and Washington (perhaps based, ironically, on the Bush administration's positive legacy, the Six-Party Talks). China can continuously be a part of U.S.-North Korea accommodation, but if Washington revives its old "regime change" policy, it would be more difficult for China to facilitate between Washington and Pyongyang. And if a new crisis between North Korea and America emerges, it is unclear whether the U.S. would request China's "partnership"⁵⁶ again.
- The fourth is the response and policy of South Korea, as discussed above. Seoul's decision to end the "Sunshine Policy" in 2008 had negative results for both inter-Korean relations and the Six-Party Talks. While the possibility of DPRK-U.S. normalization may finally be possible, North-South relations are becoming more abnormal. This is a problem for China because North Korea has been a major contributor to unease and tension in the China-South Korea "partnership." Many in the U.S. may enjoy calling China "a status quo power" in the world, but the majority of South Koreans are wary of the strengthening of China-DPRK relations (especially recent improvements in bilateral economic relations).
- The final factor is the future of U.S.-China relations. Rising concerns in the U.S. over "China's rise" as a "major," "great," or even "super" power in the region and beyond have emerged in concert with debates over whether American power is in decline.⁵⁷ In the U.S., among strategists and scholars, there is still no basic consensus on the future (peaceful coexistence and cooperation or deadly conflict) relationship between a self-worried "declining" superpower America and an exaggerated "rising power" China. China opposes the use of non-peaceful means to change the international status quo on

⁵⁶ Bonnie Glaser and Wang Liang, "North Korea: The beginning of a China-US partnership," *Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2008.

⁵⁷ See David P. Calleo, "Unipolar Illusions," London: *Survival*, vo. 49, no. 3, Autumn 2007; Richard N. Haass, "The Age of Nonpolarity: What Will Follow U.S. Dominance," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2008; <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20080501faessay87304/richard-n-haass/the-age-of-nonpolarity.html>.

the Korean peninsula. Also, China closely watches the development of U.S.-North Korea relations in case a zero-sum game emerges on the peninsula between China and the U.S. If so, in the longer run, there would be no genuine and equal cooperation, but instead, a geopolitical conflict and friction between the two big powers.

5. Conclusions and policy suggestions

Different participants and observers have different comments on the Six-Party Talks. The process is in fact the first experiment in much-needed inclusive multilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia. Therefore it is extremely important to draw lessons from the talks. Both its progresses and setbacks provide valuable information about the future of Korean denuclearization and regional security in Northeast Asia.

Economic and security interdependence among the nations of Northeast Asia are basic facts evidenced by continuous trends. Korean denuclearization is in the interest of every party including the DPRK. The Six-Party Talks have fostered regional security cooperation which, if maintained, could improve the regional security situation in Northeast Asia. If these security processes are sustained through the years to come, the result is likely to be the peaceful, stable, and cooperative regional environment that every nation very much needs.

Sino-American cooperation in helping denuclearize North Korea under the framework of the Six-Party Talks is also an innovation of security cooperation of the 21st century big power politics. If this cooperation is sustained and deepened, the nuclear issue may be solved sooner rather than later. Furthermore, if a multilateral regional security mechanism is jointly developed by the six nations, especially China and the U.S., the future of international relations in Northeast Asia would likely be quite different than if such a mechanism is not devised and implemented. The region would benefit from a more manageable, predictable, and negotiable regional security environment. To the governments and the region, my policy suggestions are:

- The Six-Party Talks should continue to move forward and upward. In the near future, multilateral agreements reached in the Six-Party Talks must be respected and implemented. Regarding the six-party process as anything less than an effective diplomatic solution and a catalyst for a much-needed regional security institution would trigger a full-blown new crisis. Maintaining denuclearization as the priority does not mean that we should wait to formalize the six-party mechanism. Indeed, a formal and permanent mechanism (as opposed to the current ad hoc character of the talks) will help achieve denuclearization.
- Continue to build shared visions and arrangements, and renew common interests. Beyond a nuclear-free peninsula, the region and its member nations need to address other

immediate and future common goals, tasks, and interests. The future of the DPRK should be decided mainly by itself. It is very necessary for the United States and South Korea to alleviate North Korea's worries about political security. Regional and international institutions can contribute to the building of common interests by giving Pyongyang a seat or membership, and offering both security assurances and economic cooperation.

- The six-party negotiating mechanism should be permanently institutionalized into a Northeast Asian peace and security mechanism in order to transform the region from a war-torn, politically and strategically divided one into a reconciliatory and integrative one. This would show the sort of regional political cooperation needed to deal with both old and new common challenges facing Northeast Asia. In addition to successfully completing Korean denuclearization, the principal tasks of the Northeast Asian regional security mechanism are: (1) to help North Korea fully integrate into the region and the world; and (2) to address more broadly pressing regional security issues.
- The Northeast Asian security mechanism should work closely with other regional bilateral or multilateral security mechanisms. It is very important to encourage policy coordination and cooperation between the Northeast Asian peace and security mechanism and the America-led alliance system. More importantly, cooperation and harmonization between the Northeast Asian security mechanism and the ASEAN mechanisms, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization can forge an inclusive and integrative regional security architecture in the long run.
- A regional dialogue forum (“talk shop”) is absolutely not enough and should not be a goal or objective of the six-party process. What the six-party process should pursue is a real security community. Big powers in general – and China and the U.S. in particular – should undertake historic cooperative leadership and responsibilities in the establishment of a new regional security framework in order to accommodate regional realities. The current level of China-U.S. cooperation is good but not good enough. The two countries should think seriously about how to upgrade their relationship to jointly manage future regional security challenges. For China, it is still impossible to join America-led regional security arrangements. Instead, in cooperation with the U.S., China can play a bigger role in conceptualizing, constructing, and participating in the regional multilateral mechanism. In order to have a common security future with China, America needs to do more, including further shifting its attitudes regarding China's rise: it must treat China as an equal partner, and even as a de facto ally in regional security.

Appendix:
Chronicle of China's relations with the DPRK
and its role in regional denuclearization cooperation since 2001

January 2001: DPRK leader Kim Jong Il pays an “informal visit” to China.

June 2001: DPRK warns it will reconsider missile test moratorium if Washington doesn't resume contacts aimed at normalizing relations.

July 2001: U.S. State Department reports that the DPRK is developing long-range missile.

September 2007: Chinese leader Jiang Zemin visits DPRK.

December 2001: U.S. President George W. Bush warns Iraq and North Korea that they will be “held accountable” if they develop weapons of mass destruction.

January 29, 2002: President Bush labels North Korea, Iran, and Iraq an “axis of evil.”

October 4, 2002: North Korea tells visiting U.S. delegation led by James A. Kelly, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, that it has a second covert nuclear weapons program.

November 11, 2002: The U.S, Japan, and South Korea halt oil supplies to the North that were promised in 1994 Agreed Framework.

January 10, 2003: The DPRK says it will withdraw from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).

April 23-25, 2003: The U.S., DPRK, and PRC hold trilateral talks on the North Korean nuclear crisis in Beijing. The head of the DPRK delegation is the Ambassador Li Gun.

July 18, 2003: China's Vice-Foreign Minister, Dai Bingguo, meets U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell in Washington in order to resume the multilateral nuclear talks. Before his Washington trip, Dai visited Pyongyang and passed a letter from China's top leader Hu Jintao to Kim Jong Il.

July 7, 2003: Newly elected ROK President Roh Moo-hyun visits China.

August 27-29, 2003: China chairs the first round of the Six-Party Talks in Beijing. There is no agreement made among the parties. China's chief Representative, Vice-Foreign Minister Wang Yi, issues a Chairman's Summary that calls for a further round of talks.

October 7, 2003: The leaders of China, the ROK, and Japan issue their Declaration of Trilateral Cooperation in Bali, Indonesia. The three countries agree that the North Korean nuclear issue should be solved through dialogues and peaceful means. They support the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

February 25-28, 2004: China chairs the second round of the Six-Party Talks in Beijing. A Chairman's Statement announces that all parties agreed to hold the third round of talks with full participation during the second quarter of 2004.

April 19-21, 2004: Kim Jong Il pays his third informal visit to China.

June 23-26, 2004: China chairs the 3rd round of the Six-Party Talks. A Chairman's Statement reconfirms the commitment to denuclearizing the Korean peninsula. All parties agree to hold a fourth round of talks before September 2005.

July 26 to August 7, 2005: China chairs the first phase of the fourth round of the Six-Party Talks.

September 13-19, 2005: China chairs the second phase of the fourth round of the Six-Party Talks. The first "Joint Statement" of the Six-Party Talks is issued on September 19.

October 8, 2005: Kim Jong Il meets the head of a Chinese delegation to Pyongyang, Vice Premier Wu Yi.

October 10, 2005: the 8th World Convention of Chinese Businesspersons is held in Seoul, South Korea.

October 28-30, 2005: Hu Jintao formally visits the DPRK for the first time since he took power in 2002. During the visit, China and the DPRK sign several bilateral agreements for strengthening their economic cooperation.

November 9-11, 2005: China chairs the first phase of the fifth round of the Six-Party Talks in Beijing.

November 16, 2005: Hu Jintao visits the ROK and attends the APEC summit in Busan.

January 10-18, 2006: Kim Jong Il visits China to discuss economic cooperation. He visits economic powerhouse provinces including Hubei, Guangdong, and Beijing.

July 10, 2006: China's top leaders including Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao exchange congratulatory telegraphs with DPRK top leaders including Kim Jong Il for the celebration of the 45th anniversary of the Chinese-Korean Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance. Meanwhile, Chinese Vice Premier Hui Liangyu leads a "friendship" delegation to Pyongyang for the celebration.

September 14, 2006: Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Qin Gang reconfirms that China has no consideration to revise the Chinese-Korean Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance. He stresses that for maintaining the peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, China's existing DPRK policy will continue.

October 9, 2006: The DPRK announces that it has successfully conducted its first nuclear test. On the same day, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs issues a statement expressing firm opposition to the test. Spokesman Liu Jianchao says on October 10 that the DPRK nuclear test negatively affects China's relations with the DPRK but that China's good neighbor and cooperative policy toward the DPRK is unchanged.

October 13, 2006: South Korea President Roh Moo-hyun visits China.

October 14, 2006: China supports the UN Security Council's Resolution 1718 to impose a limited sanction on the DPRK. China's UN representative Wang Guangya states that sanctions are not the end in themselves and that the Council's actions should both indicate the international community's firm position and help create conditions for the peaceful solution to the DPRK nuclear issue through dialogue.

December 18-22, 2006: China chairs the second phase of the fifth round of the Six-Party Talks in Beijing.

February 13, 2007: The Initial Actions for the Implementation of the September 19 2005 Joint Statement (the "February 13 Agreement") is released by China at the third session of the fifth round of the Six-Party Talks in Beijing.

March 19-22, 2007: China chairs the first phase of the sixth round of the Six-Party Talks in Beijing.

April 2007: The Chinese Foreign Ministry appoints Ms. Chen Naiqin, former ambassador to Norway, as the new special envoy for Korean peninsula affairs.

April 10-13, 2007: Chinese premier Wen Jiabao formally visits the ROK and Japan. China and the ROK mark the 15th anniversary of diplomatic relations.

July 11, 2007: According to news from China's Embassy in Pyongyang, the two countries remembered the 46th anniversary of the Chinese-Korean Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in Pyongyang with several senior DPRK officials' attendances.

July 18-20, 2007: The first phase of the sixth round of the Six-Party Talks convenes in Beijing.

September 7, 2007: Hu Jintao meets South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun in Sydney, Australia during the APEC summit.

September 27-30, 2007: The second phase of the sixth round of the Six-Party Talks is held in Beijing. On October 3, all parties release the Second-Phase Actions for the Implementation of the September 2005 Joint Statement (the "October 3 2007 Agreement").

October 9, 2007: A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman clearly expresses that China as a key signatory of the Korean armistice regime will surely play an important role in future peace regime talks in the peninsula and Northeast Asia.

October 29 2007: Liu Yunshan – member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), member of Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee, and the head of the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee – pays a "good-will" visit to the DPRK. Liu conveys an "oral message" from Hu Jintao to Kim Jong Il.

November 20, 2007: Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao meets with South Korean president Roh Moo-hyun in Singapore during the East Asia Summit.

December 5-7, 2007: The chief of the U.S. delegation to the Six-Party Talks, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, visits Beijing.

December 10-11, 2007: ROK Prime Minister Han Duck Soo pays an official visit to China to mark the closing of the China-ROK Exchange Year, a year-long bilateral cultural program. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao says China supports improved relations between South and North Korean through dialogue. He also says that China hopes to accelerate its studies on the possibility of a free trade agreement with the ROK.

December 1, 2007: U.S. President George W Bush sends "personal" letters to all leaders of the Six-Party Talks including Kim Jong Il. The letter to the DPRK leader is delivered by

Christopher Hill. U.S. National Security Council spokesman Gordon Johndroe says that President Bush “reiterated our commitment to the Six-Party Talks and stressed the need for North Korea to come forward with a full and complete declaration of their nuclear programs, as called for in the September 2005 six-party agreement.”

December 17-19, 2007: Chinese envoy Wu Dawei (Vice-Foreign Minister) visits Pyongyang to work on securing the North Korea’s denuclearization and its nuclear declaration.

March 31, 2008: Air China opens Beijing-to-Pyongyang flights. Up to now, this Beijing-based company has served as the only international commercial airline to directly link to North Korea’s capital.

May 13, 2008: Kim Jong Il expresses condolences over the loss of life in the severe earthquake in China’s Sichuan province.

June 10, 2008: China and the DPRK commemorate the 25th anniversary of Kim JongI II’s first visit to China.

June 18, 2008: Visiting Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping talks to Kim Jong Il about the Six-Party Talks.

August 8, 2008: Kim Yong Nam, president (top legislator) of the Supreme People’s Assembly of the DPRK, attends the 29th Olympic Games in Beijing.

December 2008: The embassy of People’s Republic of China in the DPRK says bilateral trade between China and the DPRK continues to increase, totaling nearly US\$2.3 billion in 2008.