
Reconstituting Korean security: A policy primer

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Korean security dilemmas: ASEAN policies and perspective

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The dominant international approach to Korean security has been to focus on military, nuclear or terrorist threats emanating from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea). This focus is not surprising; it reflects threats of great concern to the governments of several key powers in Northeast Asia – particularly the United States, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK), which are the most likely targets of any North Korean attack. However, as previous chapters in this volume have emphasized, nuclear weapons, tanks and terrorists are not the only menaces to Korean security. The DPRK's anaemic economy also constitutes a significant threat, as do criminal enterprises related to human smuggling, drug trafficking, and money laundering. These problems emanate more from North Korea's weakness than from its strength, and they raise the risk of military conflagration or terrorism if they are not dealt with appropriately. A durable framework for Korean security requires addressing these issues alongside more “traditional” military and nuclear problems. This chapter focuses on how members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) can help “reconstitute” the Korean problem and facilitate negotiations that produce greater security in Northeast Asia.

Given the relative dominance of the United Nations, the United States and Northeast Asian nations in the diplomacy surrounding Seoul and Pyongyang, ASEAN's role in Korean security may not appear particularly critical. ASEAN members have delivered modest contributions toward the aid programmes that have helped to sustain North Korea since

the food crisis, but none of the Association's 10 member states has featured prominently in the saga. Geographic distance and limited economic and military power resources provide ASEAN states with only limited bilateral influence, and no ASEAN state has been involved in the Four-Party or subsequent Six-Party Talks. ASEAN members have been neither major guarantors of Korean security nor significant challenges to it. However, that fact need not prevent ASEAN from playing a constructive “back-stage” organizational role or exercising diplomatic leadership in seeking peace and security in Northeast Asia. ASEAN members possess limited capacity to dictate solutions to the Korean crisis but offer a distinctive set of norms and institutions that could be vital in crafting a multilateral security framework for Northeast Asia.

Part of ASEAN's potential contribution is normative. ASEAN norms emphasize sovereignty and focus on dispute management rather than final resolution. Confidence-building measures and mutual respect are given great priority. Critics of ASEAN norms rightly argue that the Association's respect for sovereignty allows unsavoury regimes to persist without sufficient external challenge. However, ASEAN norms have considerable benefits as well. They have helped avert serious inter-state conflict in Southeast Asia for decades, enabling members to focus more attention on human security problems and criminality.

Avoiding catastrophic military conflict on the Korean peninsula is in everyone's interest. ASEAN members could be instrumental in reframing the Korean dispute to de-emphasize military “lines in the sand” and draw the DPRK into more meaningful engagement. Peaceful regime change in Pyongyang is unlikely in the short term, and military invasion should remain a disfavoured option of last resort. With great power talks bearing little fruit, ASEAN can help “unlock” stalled negotiations by emphasizing the value of confidence-building measures and the merits of perceiving the DPRK regime as a government with some legitimate security needs.

In addition to providing a normative model, ASEAN members exercise leadership in regional institutions that could serve as vehicles for engagement with North Korea. The ASEAN Regional Forum, the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific and other groupings could facilitate dialogue that complements the Six-Party Talks or sets the stage for a new and different series of negotiations involving the DPRK and other key players.

Korean security from an ASEAN perspective

When discussing ASEAN's approach to Korean security, it is important to distinguish between the policies and practices of the organization and

those of its 10 highly diverse constituent states. For most of its history, ASEAN's five original members – Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines – have led the organization's extra-regional security initiatives. When one speaks of an "ASEAN" approach, one often refers implicitly to consensus obtained among those five nations. Even within that sub-regional group, it is difficult to speak of a single policy approach to security in Northeast Asia and the broader Asia-Pacific region. Policies diverge even more when one adds the newer ASEAN members of Brunei, Viet Nam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia. Views diverge about the proper level of great power engagement in regional affairs, the precise role of international institutions, the importance of human rights and the appropriate mechanisms for ensuring economic development. Nevertheless, the ASEAN states have certain fundamental security perceptions in common. All have experienced the insecurity that comes when great powers collide in war, and all have suffered the destabilizing effects of economic and social dislocation. These shared perspectives give ASEAN states – and particularly the five original members – a relatively coherent and consistent view of what constitutes "security" in neighbouring Northeast Asia.

Conflict avoidance and the preservation of political and economic stability lie at the centre of ASEAN notions of security in Northeast Asia. Unlike most of the major actors in the Korean crisis, no Southeast Asian state feels directly menaced by either the DPRK, the ROK or their allies in a military sense. In the post-Cold War context, ASEAN policy-makers are also less inclined toward ideological views about the optimal solution to Korean political dilemmas, favouring an intensely pragmatic approach to the problem. ASEAN states are most concerned with the possibility that conflict in Northeast Asia or the collapse of the DPRK would drag great powers into the fray and precipitate "spillover conflicts" throughout the region. Southeast Asia has borne repeated historical witness – most notably but not exclusively in the Second World War and Indochina conflicts – to the adage that, when elephants fight, it is the grass beneath them that suffers.¹ Should destabilization in Northeast Asia cause conflagration around Taiwan or strategic competition over the vital waterways and resources of Southeast Asia, ASEAN states and societies would almost certainly suffer.

Some of the threat perceived by ASEAN policy-makers is economic. All Southeast Asian leaders fear that war or a North Korean meltdown would damage the region's somewhat fragile economy. Southeast Asia's exploding trade has created both wealth and newfound vulnerability. ASEAN countries experienced the political maelstrom and social dislocation of the 1997 financial crisis and are concerned that war could severely disrupt trade and investment or lead to rapid flight of capital. Either

would likely leave ASEAN countries with enormous economic and political problems. The same would be true if military conflict were to disrupt the maritime commerce that serves as the economic lifeline to many of the region's export-based economies. Finally, there is some concern that collapse of the North Korean regime would saddle all of the DPRK's neighbours with an enormous economic burden. The possible flight of refugees and implosion of economic production in the hermit kingdom could require sufficient Chinese, US, South Korean and Japanese resources to dampen economic growth in East Asia.

From an ASEAN perspective, conflict on the Korean peninsula could also lead to very difficult political decisions. Were China and the United States to collide, ASEAN states could be forced to take sides, presenting Southeast Asian policy-makers with a dilemma that most have cautiously tried to avoid in recent years. Military or economic reprisals are obvious concerns, and the delicate position of Southeast Asia's economically influential ethnic Chinese population makes external identification with or against China risky. Also at issue is the so-called "balance of presence" that ASEAN states have attempted to create among major external powers to avoid undue dependence on any single foreign power and unwanted antagonism of others.² ASEAN leaders have enshrined this principle as the desired Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality, commonly known as "ZOPFAN".³ The post-Cold War years have brought the first extended peace to Southeast Asia in many decades, along with a greater sense of political freedom and neutrality. Most ASEAN policy-makers view Korean insecurity as one of the greatest existing challenges to the delicate balance of power that has underlain peace and stability in contemporary East Asia.

Finally, ASEAN states share the widespread view that the DPRK's nuclear programme poses a grave security concern, even without war on the Korean peninsula or meltdown of the North Korean state. Although no ASEAN state fears direct nuclear attack from North Korea, the development of such weapons poses multiple threats. First, a DPRK nuclear programme could unravel the delicate nuclear balance in Asia, prompting Japan or South Korea to develop similar arms and thus destabilizing the region. Second, if the DPRK nuclear programme were to prove successful in deterring US or other pressure for regime change, some fear that states such as Myanmar would have an incentive to pursue weapons of mass destruction. In any event, proliferation could eventually prompt Southeast Asia's "middle powers" with the requisite technological capability to develop nuclear weapons.

Proliferation of nuclear weapons inspires added fear in the ASEAN countries that have suffered terrorist attacks. Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines are all in the midst of struggles

against organizations such as Jemaah Islamiyah and Abu Sayyaf. The possibility that such groups could acquire nuclear weapons from the cash-strapped DPRK is cause for ASEAN concern. For all of these reasons, ASEAN countries have sought to preserve a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region. In December 1995, the 10 current members of ASEAN signed the Treaty of Bangkok, which took effect in March 1997 and prohibits signatories from developing or acquiring nuclear weapons. It also enjoins members not to assist other states – including, of course, the DPRK – in the manufacture, acquisition, testing or stationing of nuclear weapons.⁴ The ASEAN states have urged China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States to sign a Protocol to the Treaty of Bangkok that would bar the stationing and use of nuclear weapons in ASEAN's geographical area. Only China has signed the Protocol, citing its divergent view on certain of the implied ASEAN territorial claims in the South China Sea. The United States and France have objected to the unconditional nature of the security commitments and the treaty's expansive territorial definitions.⁵ Nevertheless, ASEAN states remain actively engaged in an effort to minimize – if not eliminate – the possibility of nuclear proliferation or use that could endanger the region.

The intersection of human security and national defence

From an ASEAN perspective, achieving "security" on the Korean peninsula will require certain defence arrangements and a stern position against nuclear proliferation. For that reason, most ASEAN states have been strong supporters of a robust US military presence in the ROK and the surrounding region. However, ASEAN states perceive that Korean security will also require real attention to the economic and social conditions that many Southeast Asian observers see as the underlying cause of the current nuclear crisis. This entails consideration of what a growing number of authors have termed "human security" – addressing the critical needs of individuals in their daily lives.⁶ Although a spirited academic debate has emerged over the proper definition of this neologism, few would dispute the assertion that the North Korean food crisis and resulting famine constitute a grave threat to "human security", however defined.⁷ ASEAN states have long recognized that dire economic and social crises are closely linked to the more "traditional" security concerns of civil unrest, regime instability, territorial vulnerability and interstate war. Each of the 10 members of ASEAN emerged from the colonial era facing a mix of internal and external threats connected to the basic welfare of its population.

National "resilience"

Deficiencies in human security have been linked to almost all of major political and military shocks in modern Southeast Asian history leading the members of ASEAN to view Korean security through somewhat different prism than many in the developed world. In communist states such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, poor living conditions of peasant and worker populations fuel the rise of large communist insurgencies during the Cold War, protracted civil wars throughout the region. Failures to provide for human needs also fed into tensions between rival ethnic groups and stabilizing riots, often pitting an economically privileged ethnic Chinese minority against indigenous majority populations. Economic and military weakness has also made Southeast Asian states vulnerable to varying degrees of continued foreign domination. Finally, experience has shown Southeast Asian leaders that "rogue states" are prone to belligerence when they are cornered and isolated and when internal conditions begin to crumble. In 1977, Pol Pot's hermetic regime in Democratic Kampuchea launched a series of seemingly suicidal border raids against much larger states of Thailand and Viet Nam as the ruling Khmer Rouge developed a mindset of paranoia and faced imminent political and economic collapse. Rebuffed by its neighbours, menaced by China and Khmer Rouge, and facing economic strangulation from international sanctions, Viet Nam then launched a gruelling 10-year war of its own invading Cambodia in December 1978.

Recognizing the ultimate inseparability of human security and national defence in the developing world, ASEAN states have long championed concept of national security that lies squarely at the intersection of these concepts. The principle is enshrined in the Indonesian term *Ketahanan nasional* ("national resilience") advanced by President Suharto. *Ketahanan nasional* implies a deep connection between the domestic international environment and considers political, economic, social, military elements as necessary components of comprehensive security. Based on their own historical experiences, ASEAN members perceive that the North Korean government – whether admirable or not – is an interrelated foreign and domestic security challenges that cannot be overcome without considerable attention to the basic living conditions of citizens. The entire ASEAN approach to Korean security is thus predicated on the perception of the DPRK as a weak but legitimate sovereign state with legitimate security needs that require a mix of social, economic and military solutions.

From an ASEAN perspective, the Northeast Asian security dilemma is not how to topple, deter or contain the DPRK regime, but rather how

address North Korean needs sufficiently in a manner that averts the risk of confrontation and catastrophe.⁹ This is not a surprising attitude for states that have limited military power and fear that they – as members of the East Asian community – would bear a large share of the negative impact of any conflict but would benefit only modestly from a change in regime in North Korea or a prolonged “starve-out” and containment of the DPRK. To ASEAN members, the existence of an unpopular and repressive regime in Pyongyang is less onerous a burden than the risk of major military conflagration. Consequently, they prefer a “comprehensive security” approach that emphasizes economic engagement, confidence-building measures and diplomatic engagement over military methods and sanctions. In sum, most ASEAN officials would support “reconstituting” Korean security to deal with the DPRK’s weakness and insecurity as well as its menacing military behaviour.

The roles of democracy and human rights

Although ASEAN governments implicitly – and sometimes explicitly – recognize the human security needs of the North Korean population, they are generally less inclined than Western observers to construe those needs as matters of “human rights”. Instead, ASEAN officials tend to view the DPRK’s human security woes primarily as social and economic welfare issues. This difference in emphasis is related to a broader debate regarding “Western” and “Asian” values. Throughout the early years of the post-Cold War era, leaders of a number of ASEAN states – particularly Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia – have asserted that Western conceptions of liberal democracy and human rights are not always appropriate for transplantation to Asia.¹⁰ A highly publicized exchange of criticisms ensued, becoming known as the “Asian values” debate.¹¹ Critics charge that “Asian values” are a thin veneer for authoritarian practices and conservatism, whereas advocates argue that the human rights regime is part of a Western effort to preserve a form of post-colonial dominance over the region.¹²

In general, ASEAN governments have steered away from strong human rights rhetoric when addressing troubled states such as North Korea and based policy more on an effort to ensure domestic and regional stability. The strong ASEAN norm of “non-interference” has made many Southeast Asian states wary of challenging the domestic practices and basic legitimacy of the North Korean regime. The governments of Viet Nam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar have been particularly reluctant to advocate regime change or to criticize the DPRK’s human rights record lest they become the next targets of an emboldened Western human

rights or democratization campaign. These governments almost certainly fear Western sanctions – such as those imposed against Viet Nam in the 1980s or Myanmar more recently – more than the continued existence of a “rogue” regime in Pyongyang.

However, recent ASEAN relations with Myanmar suggest that at least some ASEAN members may be willing to take a harder line against the DPRK on questions related to human rights. The Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia have been particularly critical of the Myanmar junta for its democratic failings (usually avoiding the more loaded term of “human rights”). In 2005, those three states led regional efforts to block Myanmar from chairing ASEAN and hosting the annual leaders’ meeting in 2006 which it was scheduled to do under the Association’s system of rotating chairmanship. The Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia also drove the creation of an “ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Consensus” in 2005 to urge Myanmar to pursue democratic reform and free Aung San Suu Kyi, who remained under house arrest. ASEAN appointed Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar to serve as the organization’s envoy to Myanmar.¹³

The benefits of ASEAN pressure on Myanmar have been unclear to date, but ASEAN demands indicate greater willingness to “pierce the sovereign veil” and address domestic political deficiencies in member states.¹⁴ Proposing an ASEAN emissary to Pyongyang could also help even if it cannot rectify the DPRK’s human rights on its own. Pyongyang may give greater weight to gentle Southeast Asian criticism than to its more strident invective if routinely faces from the West.

ASEAN interventions in Korean security

To cope with the security challenges of the Asia-Pacific, ASEAN states especially the five original members of the organization – have come embrace a “dual-track” approach.¹⁵ The first prong of that approach to promote a stable balance of power in the region through a system of bilateral alliances. Although not all ASEAN members have been equally supportive of the US military role in the region, a general consensus exists that the status quo in Northeast Asia has had a stabilizing effect East Asia and continues to be useful. Consequently, ASEAN policymakers have been generally supportive of strong US-ROK and US-Japan alliances and defence cooperation. Former Singaporean prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, one of the most outspoken of ASEAN’s political and intellectual leaders, alluded to this principle in 1997, saying the US military presence in Asia “makes for peace and stability in the region”.

This stability serves the interest of all.¹⁶ Although ASEAN preferences do not determine the military balance in Northeast Asia, political support for US, ROK and Japanese force arrangements has been useful in upholding and buttressing the current Asia-Pacific security regime.

The second track of ASEAN security policy and practice has been to take leadership in constructing a set of normative guidelines and "soft institutions" to foster dialogue on Asian security. Many scholars and policy-makers have referred to these broadly shared normative principles and processes as the "ASEAN Way".¹⁷ This is the most distinctive aspect of ASEAN diplomacy and the one that has provided the main vehicle for direct Southeast Asian participation in the Korean dialogue. For that reason, the basic features of this approach, its past application to Northeast Asian affairs and its continued relevance to Korean security constitute the primary focuses for the discussion that follows.

The ASEAN Way

The "ASEAN Way" is a distinctive Southeast Asian set of norms and processes designed to advance regional cooperation, avoid conflict and defer or settle disputes. It bears several hallmarks, including a basic code of conduct and an established process for decision-making. The chief normative features of the ASEAN Way include a strong norm of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states, a respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, an emphasis on crafting regional solutions to regional problems and a firm commitment to peaceful dispute resolution.

The norms emphasized by ASEAN members are not unique to the developing world, but they have had particularly great resonance in Southeast Asia. They emerged largely from a shared sense of vulnerability. Southeast Asian states were deeply affected by colonial rule and have been acutely sensitive to foreign intervention in domestic affairs and undue external involvement in guiding regional affairs. The threat of communist insurgency perceived by the Association's five original members – Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines – also contributed to a sense of shared identity that underlies the strong regional conception of ASEAN norms.¹⁸ In the midst of difficult territorial disputes such as the Brunei Revolt, the expulsion of Singapore from the Federation of Malaya, the struggle over Sabah and the expanding war in Viet Nam, ASEAN members perceived that they faced a choice of "hanging together or hanging separately". To preserve peace and stability in the region, ASEAN has consistently emphasized sovereignty and non-interference – even in the face of frequent Western criticism – and has attempted to avoid the use of force in dispute settlement. Its success

in conflict avoidance has generally emboldened proponents of the ASEAN Way.

The process of ASEAN diplomacy has also been distinctive. Culturally, it is based on the concept of *musyawarah* and *mufakat* ("consultation and consensus"), the traditional decision-making process of local Malaysian and Indonesian politics. It represents a conscious effort to avoid what many ASEAN officials view as the overly formal and legalized institutions of the West.¹⁹ *Musyawarah* and *mufakat* imply that a problem will first be addressed in informal discussions aimed at bringing about increased trust, frank dialogue and a general consensus on the best way forward. Issues are raised for formal deliberation and decision only once these more discreet consultations produce general agreement.²⁰ A former Philippine Foreign Secretary Carlos Romulo said: "We often find that private meetings over breakfast prove more important than formal meetings."²¹ Although consensus does not necessarily imply unanimity it does connote an acceptance by all parties that dissenting views have been taken into consideration and addressed in an adequate manner.

ASEAN-style diplomacy is also grounded in the realities of power politics in Southeast Asia. The Association's informal process of consultation and consensus has helped ASEAN maintain a reasonable degree of regional integrity. The process of consultation and consensus reduce each member's exposure to domination by external powers. At the same time, it helps preserve the relations among ASEAN members – old and new – by limiting the ability of the majority to impose its will on the minority in sensitive cases and preventing a public loss of face by member whose views do not sway the decision.²² Over several decades, the practice of conducting diplomacy in this manner has given rise to a distinctive "security culture" among ASEAN officials.²³ The development of shared habits and practices thus buttresses cultural dispositions and powerful political logic as reasons for continued regional adherence to the ASEAN Way.

As in other areas of the developing world, regime security and social and ethnic cohesion became more compelling priorities for almost all ASEAN governments than territorial "state" security as understood in the West. Providing for the economic welfare of growing populations and heading off domestic challenges to the governing structures have usually been more important than guarding against external threats. Even when foreign menaces have existed, they have usually operated through local resistance movements. Consequently, ASEAN leaders have tended to view the project of international security as demanding a significant degree of solidarity among governing élites. The ASEAN emphasis on preserving sound personal relations among high-level officials also derives from the different structure of foreign policy-making

many Asian states, where a relatively small number of people within the executive branch of government often dominate the foreign policy process for an extended period of time. This is particularly true for authoritarian states in which a single party or ruling clique has held power for many years, such as North Korea. The ASEAN Way is premised on the notion that diplomatic barbs can be perceived as personal slights, and the resulting tension in personal relations among powerful officials can have profound diplomatic effects.²⁵

A necessary corollary to the ASEAN Way is the willingness of all parties to defer settlement of contentious issues when consensus is not obtained. That practice constitutes both a strength and a limitation of the ASEAN Way. Critics fault a process that often fails to deliver a timely, clear and definitive resolution to sensitive political, economic and territorial disputes. Proponents counter that *musyawarah* and *mufakat* have proven remarkably effective at generating improved relations and avoiding conflict. They place less emphasis on the need for a bright-line resolution and generally believe that aggressive conflict-resolution efforts create an unjustifiably great risk of conflict and insecurity. Instead, ASEAN officials have sought to manage disagreement in the hope and expectation that disputes will ultimately subside as relations stabilize and trust and interdependence grow. The main thrust of ASEAN policy toward the Korean crisis has been an attempt to draw the major interested parties – principally the Northeast Asian powers and the United States – into a multilateral setting that is conducive to ASEAN-style diplomacy. The primary vehicles for ASEAN's policy engagement have been organizations that build on the ASEAN model. Perhaps more than any other countries, ASEAN states have pushed for an institutionalized, broadly multilateral approach to security in Northeast Asia.

ASEAN's emphasis on regional and institutional solutions to the Korean crisis is partly owing to its members' inability to drive policy on a bilateral basis. Institutional frameworks are essential in increasing their "punching power" and helping them to shape substantive outcomes.²⁶ ASEAN's own success is also partly responsible for the faith that its members have in institutionalization and socialization. ASEAN emerged in the 1960s when one power – Indonesia – was pursuing an aggressive foreign policy of *Konfrontasi* ("Confrontation") and when others, such as Malaysia and the Philippines, approached the brink of war over territorial disputes. ASEAN's practice of "consultation and consensus" and its norm of non-interference have helped to avert conflict and produce a remarkable period of peace in the region. Those norms and practices have also made constructive dialogue possible between states with very different domestic political systems.

Opening links with North Korea

The ideological diversity of ASEAN's members and the strong ASEAN norm of non-interference have made Pyongyang comfortable engaging with a number of ASEAN states on a bilateral basis. Ties between the DPRK and the former Indo-Chinese states of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam have existed for many years, underpinned by a sense of socialist fraternity and the close personal relationship between Kim Il Sung and Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk.²⁷ In Hanoi, the Vietnamese Institute for Southeast Asian Studies became one of the first and most important forums where North Korean officials and scholars could interact closely with peers from capitalist neighbours. Recently, more worries have developed between North Korea and Myanmar, as the two internationally isolated and militaristic regimes have allegedly begun trading drugs and weaponry.²⁸

Capitalist ASEAN states have also been willing to engage at arm length with North Korea. In July 2002, Indonesia and the DPRK signed a pair of economic agreements to facilitate trade and technical cooperation, following on a bilateral investment accord in 2000.²⁹ Similar agreements and a US\$10 million loan helped to strengthen economic ties with Malaysia in 2000 and 2001. Thailand and Singapore rank among North Korea's top bilateral trading partners, consistent with Kim Il Sung's guidance in 1994 that, "since the socialist bloc markets are gone, we have to actively pursue trade with the Southeast Asian countries."³⁰ ASEAN states have become important sources of rice, oil, rubber and manufactured goods for the DPRK. These "pull factors" have created a margin of comfort and trust in Pyongyang's dealings with ASEAN countries that could be a valuable tool in any DPRK engagement strategy.

Institutionalizing the ASEAN Way

ASEAN states have used a number of institutional devices in an attempt to extend their model of diplomacy to the broader Asia-Pacific community and, among other goals, to increase dialogue between North Korea and its neighbours. ASEAN states were key proponents of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC) in 1989. They were even more influential in leading the formation of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP) in 1993 as vehicles for expanded security dialogue and continued great power involvement in a multilateral security framework East Asia.³¹ In subsequent years, ASEAN states also led the formati-

of several other groups and processes, including ASEAN Plus Three (APT) and the Asia-Europe Meetings (ASEM).

"Track-two" engagement: CSCAP

Contemporary ASEAN engagement in Korean security issues began very modestly with the creation of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific. Modelled loosely on the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, CSCAP was designed to promote regional security through formal and informal dialogue and consultation among non-governmental leaders at a number of prominent Asian strategic studies centres. Representatives from the five original ASEAN members, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Canada and the United States convened for a series of meetings in Honolulu, Bali, Seoul and Kuala Lumpur between October 1991 and June 1993 and decided to institute this "track-two" process as a complement to official "track-one" diplomacy. The founding members of CSCAP explicitly cited the annual ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference (PMC) as inspiration, noting its "significant contribution to the development of a multilateral political-security dialogue for the Asia Pacific region" in its founding Kuala Lumpur Statement. The statement also presented an inclusive institutional agenda, asserting that "the participants support the multilateralization of the ASEAN PMC process... and welcome the early inclusion of other countries in the region".³²

Although North Korea was not a founding member of CSCAP, it joined the organization in December 1994, shortly after the establishment of a CSCAP working group on Northeast Asia. Representatives of Canada and Japan chair that working group, which has met 11 times and focused overwhelmingly on the security of the Korean peninsula. North Korean participation began with the second conference in Vancouver in 1997, creating rare opportunities for dialogue – however informal – with leaders of the "hermit kingdom".³³ Like the ARF, created in the same year, CSCAP operates on the basis of ASEAN-inspired principles of diplomacy. It emphasizes consensus-building over majoritarian processes, which differs considerably from many extra-regional institutions. It also embodies an "incrementalist" approach to progress and operates by pursuing change at a pace acceptable to all members.³⁴ CSCAP is rare in that it has been led not by the largest or most influential powers in a region, but by middle powers instead, which may partly explain the DPRK's willingness to participate.³⁵

To date, CSCAP's ability to influence the direction of policy toward Korean security has been very limited, and ASEAN-led efforts to extend multilateral confidence-building measures to the Korean peninsula have likewise made comparatively little progress. CSCAP actively supported

the establishment of a North Pacific Security Dialogue, but both that and the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue and Northeast Asia Security Dialogue – proposed by South Korea – were track-two talks designed to secure DPRK participation. No official-level talks ensued.³⁶ CSCAP chief contribution, therefore, has been to serve as a space in which North Korean representatives can engage in dialogue with partners from other nations. Although this achievement should by no means be dismissed as insignificant, it falls short of the progress that many had hoped such "track-two" engagement would bring.

The ASEAN Regional Forum, APEC, ASEM and ASEAN + 3

The same basic record of achievement applies to the ASEAN Region Forum, though on a considerably greater scale and on an official level. The creation of the ARF in 1993 was particularly notable, because it was an official process with rare breadth in membership, including Japan, China, Russia, the United States, the European Union, all of the ASEAN states, and others. In its first several meetings, the ARF conspicuously chewed involvement in the contentious debate surrounding the Korean crisis. At that time, the United States government also expressed its position to including North Korea in the ARF framework, saying that certain states were not ready for membership.³⁷ However, the organization had a sufficiently promising start to prompt Singaporean official Kishore Mahbubani to express growing confidence in ASEAN's style of diplomacy, saying "only an ASEAN invitation... could draw the major powers to sit together to discuss security matters in the Asia-Pacific cause only ASEAN enjoyed the confidence of all the major powers as impartial organization".³⁸

The ASEAN Regional Forum commented directly on the Korean problem for the first time in 1997, commending the progress made by the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization and support for engagement of the DPRK via the Four-Party Talks. In 1999, the Philippine chairman of the ARF, Foreign Minister Domingo Siazon, expressed "concern" over North Korea's nuclear programme for the first time, showing that the organization could also serve as an instrument of pressure. Siazon criticized the missile launch and indicated that it "could heighten tensions and have serious consequences for stability in the Korean Peninsula and the region".³⁹

During the late 1990s, ASEAN states also continued to press for North Korean entry into the ARF. Their efforts came to fruition in July 2000 when North Korea applied for membership and joined the organization at its Seventh Annual Meeting in Bangkok, becoming the ARF's twelfth member. Asian neighbours interpreted North Korea's applica-

to the ARF and the attendance of Foreign Minister Paek Nam Sun as a major positive shift in DPRK diplomacy. With few exceptions, Pyongyang had previously shunned international arrangements, and its change in tack was touted as a diplomatic victory for ASEAN and other proponents of "soft institutionalism" in the Asia-Pacific. Thai Foreign Minister Pitsuwan, who chaired the meeting, welcomed DPRK participation and asserted that it would contribute to regional peace, confidence and mutual understanding. North Korea's neighbours raised the possibility of loans to the cash-strapped regime, and some voiced support for DPRK entry into international financial institutions such as the Asian Development Bank. Paek even won praise from many of the Asian members of the ARF by voicing his disapproval of the US plan to develop a National Missile Defense system.⁴⁰

DPRK participation in the ARF's Seventh Annual Meeting created an opportunity for two path-breaking bilateral meetings as well. Paek met with Japanese Foreign Minister Kono and, at the conclusion of their talks, the two sides issued a joint statement expressing their desire to resume stalled negotiations on normalization. In addition, Paek and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright held first-ever US-DPRK ministerial talks on the margins of the ARF conference.⁴¹ Although progress on the issue of nuclear weaponry was scant, Albright referred to the meeting as a "symbolically historic step" in defusing tensions across the 38th parallel and securing the Korean peninsula.⁴² That meeting led to the visit of a DPRK envoy to Washington and Albright's trip to Pyongyang in October 2000. Two years later, the Ninth ARF meeting in Brunei afforded an opportunity for Paek to meet new US Secretary of State Colin Powell. In that regard, the ARF played a very helpful role as a provider of unthreatening diplomatic space for engagement.⁴³

The year 2000 also saw increasing attention to Korean security in two other important Asian forums – Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, designed to build a stronger framework for Asia-Pacific economic cooperation, and the Asia-Europe Meeting, created to facilitate dialogue between European and Asian nations. In October, APEC leaders issued a statement expressing similar commitment to a peaceful solution but specifically calling on Pyongyang to honour its obligations under the non-proliferation regime. The APEC statement also hinted at economic incentives, citing the potential for the DPRK to benefit economically from "greater participation as a member of the Asia-Pacific community".⁴⁴ At the Third ASEM meeting in October 2000, 26 leaders from Asia and Europe adopted the Seoul Declaration for Peace on the Korean Peninsula. Although China intervened on the DPRK's behalf to omit the critical reference to curbing weapons of mass destruction, the declaration was

symbolically important and showed to many the benefit of establishing multilateral forums for engagement with the DPRK. Less than two weeks later, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the first inter-Korean joint resolution on peace, security and unification in history. Finally, at the November APEC summit meeting, Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah served as chairman and warmly congratulated South Korean President Kim Dae Jung for winning the Nobel Peace Prize. He expressed support for Kim's "contribution to the process of reconciliation and cooperation on the Korean Peninsula" and "endeavor to encourage the participation of North Korea in the APEC Working Groups".⁴⁵

According to Thai Foreign Minister Pitsuwan and other proponents of the ASEAN Way, North Korean entry into the ARF and the developments at APEC and ASEM served to reinforce ASEAN's relevance and prove the merits of the "soft institutional" approach in Asian security. However, the DPRK entry into the ARF would prove to be that forum's most significant contribution to Korean security. The ARF and APEC lost much prestige after the Asian financial meltdown, the Indonesian "haze" crisis and the East Timor crisis, when they were perceived to be ineffective in addressing crises in their own backyard. Critics argued that an organization that could not deal effectively with Southeast Asian problems would surely be incapable of major influence in resolving much more explosive military standoffs in places such as Korea and Taiwan. The ARF has proven extremely successful in expanding its membership to include countries such as India, Papua New Guinea, Cambodia, Mongolia and Myanmar. The ARF has also been relatively successful in facilitating modest confidence-building measures. However, it has been unable to approach the more ambitious goals of leading peace-keeping and conflict prevention activities.⁴⁶

Recognizing that these forums would have limited capacity for direct action and seeking deeper engagement with the major Northeast Asian powers, ASEAN then led the creation of another multilateral group known as "ASEAN Plus Three" (APT), which also includes China, Japan and South Korea.⁴⁷ The APT was created primarily to address economic issues and has played only a marginal role in addressing the problem of Korean security. For example, in November 2002 ASEAN leaders assembled in Phnom Penh for the Eighth Summit Meeting of the APT and met with South Korean officials to discuss cooperation regarding the DPRK weapons programme, expressing shared concern but also a shared commitment to resolve the crisis peacefully.⁴⁸

The role of the ARF as an institutional space for discussing Korean security also received a modest boost in June 2003, when US Secretary of State Colin Powell used the ARF as a venue for pushing a multilateral

solution to the North Korean nuclear crisis. He asserted that the issue was "not a bilateral matter between the United States and North Korea. It affects every nation in the region that would fall under the arc of a North Korean missile."⁴⁹ The ARF remains one of the few forums in which multilateral pressure can be brought to bear upon Pyongyang, though such pressure has yet to produce concrete results. At the Thirteenth meeting of the ARF in July 2006, the organization called on the DPRK to rejoin the Six-Party Talks, and many members censured Pyongyang's test of ballistic missiles earlier that month.⁵⁰ DPRK Foreign Minister Paek rebuffed the pressure and even said that his country might "reconsider whether to stay in the ARF."⁵¹ However, other members doubted that Pyongyang would carry through with that threat, because the ARF is one of the country's few meaningful ties with the international community and provides Pyongyang with an important gateway to foreign aid and dialogue. The Australian foreign minister summarized that view by saying, "if North Korea boycotts ARF, it will have a cold and lonely time at home."⁵²

The project of institutionalizing security in the Asia-Pacific and drawing North Korea into that fold remains largely aspirational.⁵³ The ARF, APT, CSCAP and other institutions remain profoundly important in ASEAN security strategy, particularly when it comes to engaging in issues of security outside of ASEAN's core geographical area. Those institutions have had a short time to develop and considerable hurdles to overcome, and thus far they have paled in comparison with the relevance of great power diplomacy in resolving the Korean conflict. However, they provide one of the only viable ways to engage the DPRK, and they present useful opportunities for less formal bilateral and multilateral dialogue to complement the more acrimonious Six-Party Talks and other great power processes.

Possible future ASEAN contributions to Korean security

As noted at the outset, ASEAN states have limited means for taking serious diplomatic initiatives at the bilateral level. The risks of such engagement are great and the chances of success very slim without considerable great power backing. However, ASEAN states are as well positioned as any outside powers to engage the DPRK through regional institutions and draw its neighbours into a broader dialogue. ASEAN's own inclusion of four very unpopular regimes between 1995 and 1999 – Viet Nam, Laos, Myanmar and finally Cambodia – showed that its members are willing to pursue serious (and sometimes controversial) diplomatic engagement.

A way to draw Pyongyang in from the cold?

Although ASEAN's role in Korean security is likely to remain limited in the short term, the potential for real contributions exists. The greatest weakness of organizations such as the ARF and ASEM is also their greatest asset as vehicles for engaging ostracized states such as North Korea. The informality and organizational patience that have kept the ARF from developing into a robust forum for preventive diplomacy have also made Pyongyang sufficiently comfortable to join the organization. ASEAN is not alone in finding these "soft institutions" useful. South Korean leaders have consistently seen the ARF and ASEM as useful forums in which to engage Pyongyang, strengthen the lines of communication and build international cooperation on the Korean peninsula.⁵⁴ means to ease tensions and improve security on the Korean peninsula. ASEAN states, for their part, have seen those institutions as ways to bolster policies of engagement such as the ROK's "Sunshine Policy" of the late 1990s.

The major regional powers – namely China, Japan, South Korea, the United States and, to a lesser extent, Russia – continue to debate the wisdom of attempting to engage North Korea in a process of diplomacy that offers incentives for good behaviour.⁵⁵ That debate has been raging for over a decade, and ASEAN states will not be able to decide it on their own. However, ASEAN's regional initiatives in creating the ARF, ASEM, the APT, CSCAP and other organizations place a thumb on the scale in favour of engagement. These ASEAN-centric institutions provide a structure through which low-risk diplomatic engagement can occur, even while official relations between Pyongyang and its neighbours remain cold. ASEAN has also shown through experience that engagement of "rogue states" can work – at least up to a point – in defusing tensions and creating the conditions for economic and political transition.

The ASEAN Way does not promise a quick, easy or clean path to removing the human and traditional security problems on the Korean peninsula. It is unlikely in the near term to deliver a "final solution" to the Korean conflict and provide a decisive form of conflict resolution. It does, however, offer a path for facilitating broader regional involvement and changing the nature of negotiations. In a deadlocked and dangerous security environment, seeking new avenues for productive exchange can be critical. A new approach to negotiations can also "unlock" progress toward more fruitful talks involving the great powers.

Some analysts are pessimistic about the possibility of ASEAN state playing an important role in security affairs beyond Southeast Asia, arguing that the ASEAN Way is neither designed nor well adapted to managing extra-mural conflicts. Such critics dismiss the ARF – ASEAN's primary

initiative to reach out to the broader East Asian region – as a “talking shop” that creates a more benign regional political environment but can do little to resolve concrete disputes.⁵⁶ Indeed, it may be that the ARF can best serve as a sort of “staging ground” for more concrete and substantive diplomacy by providing a useful venue for the development of personal relationships and trust between the DPRK and its neighbours. However, historical experience suggests that such a role should not be discounted. The instrumental role that ASEAN played in resolving the Cambodian conflict in the 1980s may provide a helpful analogy.

An analogy to the Cambodian stalemate

In the 1980s, the Cambodian conflict was the central concern in South-east Asian security. ASEAN states played a quiet but influential role in internationalizing the peace process and drawing reluctant officials from Viet Nam, the Hanoi-backed People's Republic of Kampuchea and the rival Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea into meaningful negotiations. Indonesia became the official ASEAN “interlocutor” with Viet Nam in 1984 and served as the organization's primary conduit to Hanoi. Indonesia used its reputation as a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement to build credibility with Hanoi and its adversaries, drawing all sides into a series of Jakarta Informal Meetings (JIMs) in 1987 and 1988.⁵⁷ Many dismissed the meetings as “cocktail parties”, and the JIMs certainly could not have produced a peace deal without a developing consensus among the great powers on how to handle the Cambodian impasse. Nevertheless, the JIMs helped draw local and great power rivals into negotiation and led to more formal talks in France that ultimately produced the Paris Peace Accords in October 1991. ASEAN's best contribution to Korean security could be to play a similar role.

Conclusion

ASEAN, the ARF, the APT and CSCAP have not been greatly influential to date, but they remain among the most promising vehicles for truly regionalizing and “reconstituting” the Korean security problem. ASEAN and related ASEAN-centric institutions are generally viewed as less partial than international bodies with a more predominant Western component. Since the DPRK is less apt to view ASEAN as the tool of any single great power, ASEAN may possess the credibility to help kick-start talks that lead to a more productive series of great power negotiations.

To be successful, any ASEAN-led talks will need to “reconstitute” Korean security to account for the non-military security concerns that

plague both Pyongyang and some of its key neighbours. ASEAN will not be able to solve the DPRK's economic woes or put an abrupt end to its anti-democratic practices or human rights violations, but it can speak with credibility about ways to approach those problems. ASEAN members have considerable experience in dealing with the types of insecurity that emanate from weak states as well as from strong ones. ASEAN's own intra-natural security cooperation has focused increasingly on challenges such as human smuggling, drug trafficking, refugee flows and environmental degradation. The success of ASEAN in averting conflict among its members and preserving reasonably good relationships among governing officials testifies to the potential application of the ASEAN way in coaxing the DPRK toward better behaviour and “socializing” Pyongyang.

ASEAN's normative and institutional approach will certainly not be enough to guarantee Korean security alone; the ARF, the APT, CSCAP and other organizations in Asia's alphabet soup of regional forums are no substitute for balance of power arrangements and alliance structure. Defence cooperation and great power diplomacy based on economic and military carrots and sticks still constitute the principal “load-bearing structures” of Northeast Asian security.⁵⁸ However, the emergent normative and institutional framework led by ASEAN can smooth some of the rough edges of power politics by providing an added mechanism for dispute resolution and creating a forum for the development of a more robust code of conduct that must underlie any solution to the Korean conflict.⁵⁹

Notes

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13

Korean security: A policy primer

Hazel Smith

This book has the twofold objective of interpreting how the Democrat People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea) interacts with the world and why and how North Korean security interests, objectives and behaviour can be best understood by those international interlocutors that react to and engage with the DPRK. In responding to those objectives, our contributors were set two tasks. The first was to offer a better and more comprehensive analysis of Korean security dilemmas than normally available in the conventional, narrowly focused, security literature. The second was to offer policy suggestions, based on that comprehensive analysis, for all those global policy-makers grappling with how to make the Korean peninsula a more secure and safer place.

Reconceptualizing Korean security: Why it matters

We tackled security questions from the perspective that hard security issues are as important as soft security matters, but that the former cannot be understood or their dilemmas unravelled without a clear engagement with the latter. The classic national security concerns of nuclear proliferation and the production, sale and use of weapons of mass destruction cannot, in other words, be addressed in the Korean peninsula without the same time considering the implications and interrelationship of what are these days known as human security issues of food, poverty and population more controversially, freedom. We agree that East Asia and the