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The OSCE and South Korea

The Korean Peninsula and Geostrategic Complexity

The Korean peninsula remains one of the most dangerous places on earth. Surrounding the peninsula are the world's three principal nuclear powers, the US, Russia and China. The two largest economic powers, the US and Japan, are still engaged politically and geographically. The four great powers see their interests interwoven in a volatile area surrounding the Korean peninsula. And the division of the peninsula still increases instability and complexity.

This unstable region lacks a regional security framework analogous to NATO or the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). There is still no peace treaty on the Korean peninsula, where more than a million troops from the opposing sides remain deployed within miles of each other. Northeast Asia's institutions are startlingly inadequate for coping with regional problems, given the enormity of the disruption that foreseeable changes in Korea could provoke. In the absence of capable institutions, long-standing bilateral treaties still provide the crucial backbone of military deterrence. In stark contrast with Europe, which has a rich organizational infrastructure, including NATO, the EU and the OSCE, Asia still lacks institutions to help it adjust to the changed circumstances.

A vital cornerstone of stability in Northeast Asia are the US-Japan and the US-South Korea security alliances, which are both reinforced by the stationing of US troops in the area. The greatest danger posed by the new shape of Northeast Asia is that populist pressures, economic disorder and changing technology will incite a destabilizing struggle over the regional balance of power. The perils implicit in such a power struggle are especially acute because Northeast Asia, unlike Europe, has no regional institutions capable of muting paranoid perceptions and setting mutual goals.

Lack of Multilateralism

There has been no leading power in Northeast Asia, which is needed to build a community, while the relatively weaker Southeast Asian countries have staunchly insisted on their own. Furthermore, Northeast Asians have not succeeded in resolving the tension between the overriding need to keep the US engaged in the region and the desire to establish a Northeast Asian identity. As a result, the process of community-building has been slow and antipathy flourishes. The responsibility for securing confidence and ensuring stability in Northeast Asia lies largely with Japan and China, the region's most signifi-

cant powers. But neither country has been willing or able to shoulder this burden. Unlike China and Japan, the countries of Southeast Asia have actively developed structures in order to shape relations in their region. Their main tool for doing so has been the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)¹, which has made some progress in forging a common identity between its diverse members.

In the 1990s, much of the rhetoric concerning security relations in Northeast Asia has involved reference to ASEAN. The Association has played a significant international role through its Postministerial Conferences (PMCs)², the Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), as well as through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)³. While the economic institutions can at least claim to be trying to build a community or a shared identity in East Asia, the same cannot be said of ARF, the region's only multilateral security framework. The Forum was formally proposed by ASEAN and endorsed by its dialogue partners at the PMC in July 1993. The first working session of ARF foreign ministers - in which, in addition to the then ASEAN states, *inter alia*, Australia, Canada, China, Laos, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, Russia and Vietnam participated - was held in July 1994. India and Mongolia joined in 1998; in 2000 North Korea also became a member.

ARF was initially designed as a second-tier arrangement to supplement the region's bilateral links, and to act as a mechanism. Therefore, the ARF framework should be confined only in its viability dependent on the prior existence of a stable balance. It was, however, not in a position to create it.

A greater role in directing Northeast Asia's future should also be reserved for Track II institutions and processes (unofficial contacts among non-governmental actors), especially those that deepen understanding among Seoul, Washington, Tokyo and Beijing. On issues of comprehensive security in particular, a new set of institutions, which includes the Council for Security and Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP), has begun to evolve. These private-sector groups have come to play an important role, particularly because formal intergovernmental bodies have been so weak and diplomatic process so complicated. The processes of Track II would vitally help moderate what could otherwise be volatile, destabilizing tendencies in the new geopolitics of Northeast Asia.

1 Members of ASEAN are: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei (since 1984), Myanmar (since 1994), Vietnam (since 1995), Laos (since 1997) and Cambodia (since 1997).

2 These are taking place after the regular meetings of ASEAN foreign ministers together with the foreign ministers of the dialogue partners Australia, Canada, China, EU, India, Japan, Mongolia, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea and the US.

3 Members of ARF are the ten ASEAN member states, eleven dialogue partners (Australia, Canada, China, EU, India, Japan, Mongolia, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea and the US) as well as two ASEAN observers (Papua New Guinea, North Korea).

Model Role of the OSCE

The Helsinki process has been regarded in Korea from its beginning as a multilateral framework to overcome the systemic and ideological division in Europe. The process which started in the 1970s with the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), which became the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in January 1995, was initiated with an aim of easing tension in Europe. Its structure prevailed over the East-West partition and embraced practically all the states of Europe. The evolution of the CSCE has not progressed as a kind of grand design or been implemented in accordance with plans for a new European security architecture. The transformation of the Helsinki process was a response to acute needs and requirements. It was a continuous process of creative development of the new political and security environment.⁴

Initially, the agenda of the Helsinki process (1975-1985) was identified with human rights and basket III issues (human contacts, exchange of information, culture and education). At the next stage (1986-1992), the CSCE human dimension was supplemented by militarily significant aspects of security (confidence- and security-building measures, the 1990 Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe and the 1992 Open Skies Treaty). Since the 1992 Helsinki Summit Meeting, OSCE activities have been preoccupied with conflict prevention and crisis management and development of co-operative security. Furthermore, the Organization has tried to promote common values, as defined by the Charter of Paris for a New Europe: human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law, economic liberty, social justice and environmental responsibility.

As the theme of the OSCE-Korea Conference 2001 in Seoul indicated, interests of Koreans were concentrated on confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) surrounding the Korean peninsula. The concept of confidence-building measures (CBMs) was introduced by the CSCE. The aim was to build trust through increased transparency and predictability of military activities. The scope of the concerned agreements was modest and mainly based on voluntary participation, as the states were not ready to accept strict obligations in this field. These measures included the obligatory notification of military manoeuvres and the exchange of observers on a voluntary and bilateral basis.

According to the change of international circumstances, the first stage of CBMs from Helsinki has been reviewed and improved. The concept of CSBMs was introduced at the Stockholm Conference on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe (1984-1986). The mandate foresaw that the measures had to cover the whole of Europe, be of military significance, politically binding, and verifiable. The verification re-

4 Cf. Emmanuel Decaux, CSCE Institutional Issues at the Budapest Conference, in: Helsinki Monitor, Special Issue: Budapest Review Conference, 3/1994, p.18.

gime was the most significant advance in this second stage of CSBMs. But it was doubtful that it allowed any participating State to address an inspection request to another participating State on its territory in compliance with the CSBMs. The follow-up meeting in Vienna from 1986-1989 expanded the measures agreed upon in Stockholm and created a new set of mutually complementary CSBMs.

These ultimately became the first Vienna Document of 1990. Concerning the CSBMs, the Document set up the computer-based CSCE/OSCE communication network for CSBM information exchange, and established the Annual Implementation Assessment Meeting (AIAM) for all participating States to review and discuss implementation of the regime. The negotiations on CSBMs continued and resulted in the second Vienna Document of 1992, which amended the previous Document in a number of ways, including further information exchange on non-active forces. After continued negotiations, the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) adopted the revised Vienna Document of 1994. The major change was that the Document incorporated and widened the above Documents on defence planning, military contacts and co-operation. The Document included the right to request a clarification of defence planning and an annual discussion meeting. Participating States were also encouraged to provide additional information, such as defence white papers.

From 1994 to 1998, changes to the CSBM regime were not incorporated into a new document but rather taken as individual decisions in the FSC. In late 1997, the Forum decided to undertake a complete revision of the Vienna Document. But most changes of the Document were incremental. The Vienna Document of 1999, which includes all the revisions made since 1994, revises the regime's structure. Concerning the military organization, manpower and major weapons system, the new Document enhances transparency and predictability. For example, the Document provides for an annual exchange of information on defence planning. This measure is based on the conviction that a proper planning process is the sign of democratic control of armed forces. The Document also includes prior notification of certain military activities as well as annual calendars of such activities, to which, in certain cases, observers shall be invited. The provisions for compliance and verification of measures were to contain the right to conduct inspection and evaluation visits. At this time, Koreans are more interested in the early CBMs which the CSCE had developed in the 1970s.

South Korea as an Initiator of Multilateralism

One can conclude that in terms of simple ranking by aggregate capability, South Korea is at present located in the middle of the middle ranks, and upwardly mobile. It is one of perhaps two dozen countries that might, in these

terms, claim to be middle powers. But by Hedley Bull's more demanding test, South Korea would not count as a middle power.⁵ It has been, and seems likely to remain for some time yet, too beset by its own problems to create a wider role for itself, and has barely begun to develop the features of a recognized middle power leader along the lines set down by countries such as Canada, Australia, the former Yugoslavia, India and Mexico.⁶

States are not mobile and cannot escape their local environment. Regions are likely to remain very important for military, political, societal and environmental relations, and possibly also for economic ones. Local states will be both more responsible for the order or disorder in their own vicinity. Middle powers therefore have an interest in promoting regional security regimes and regional economic co-operation, and in general trying to establish firm foundations for the regional international community.

It is difficult for South Korea to play as a middle power. Its history - as a peripheral vassal of China, as a battleground between China and Japan, as a colony of Japan, and as an ally and protectorate of the US - has not offered fertile ground for the development of an expansive diplomatic tradition. As a result of the Cold War, Korea is also stuck with its own intense local security problem which, as long as it remains unresolved, necessarily dominates its political and military concerns and limits any ambitions to a wider diplomatic role.

Because of the vulnerability of its local situation, South Korea would be easily affected by a development of the East Asian balance of power. Nothing would be worse than for Korea to find itself caught in the middle of a Sino-Japanese rivalry. For this reason, South Korea should give priority to building a regional international regime in such a way as to minimize the probability that East Asia's structural similarity to 19th century Europe generates a similar type of armed balance of power system.

Since 1993, the South Korean government has intensively expressed its interest in a regional framework for security co-operation. Its desire was expedited by the increasing concerns over North Korean nuclear development. South Korean Foreign Minister Han Sungjoo suggested that South Korea should show initiative in developing a multilateral mechanism for security dialogue centering around Northeast Asia. He thought that the ASEAN-led ARF was not enough to discuss the security of Northeast Asia and that a multilateral security framework on a subregional basis was needed to build a long-term vision akin to a "mini-CSCE", which would aim at such security co-operation like confidence and security building, arms control and conflict

5 Cf. Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, London 1977.

6 Cf. Barry Buzan, *Changing Paradigms of National and International Security and Their Implications for Security Planning of Middle Power Countries*, in: Byung-Moo Hwang (Ed.), *Korean Security Policies Toward Peace and Unification*, The KAIS International Conference Series No. 4, Seoul 1996, pp. 3-30

settlement.⁷ Why did the South Korean government call for a mini-CSCE type security dialogue in Northeast Asia outside of the ASEAN-led security forum? The simplest answer, perhaps, is that South Korea has become increasingly preoccupied with concerns about how to maintain security on the divided Korean peninsula.

South Korean Engagement

South Korea was invited, following an official request from Seoul, as an observer to the 1994 Budapest Review Conference for the first time. Since that time, South Korea has participated in relevant OSCE meetings. South Korea is provided with access to OSCE official documentation and may be requested on a case-by-case basis to OSCE meetings on subjects in which it has a special interest. The Lisbon Summit of 1996 decided to invite South Korea as a partner for co-operation to participate in meetings as appropriate. With this resolution South Korea is said to have status to take part in OSCE meetings, including Summits, Ministerial Councils and review conferences, as well as various seminars. But South Korea cannot participate in the decision-making process and has no right to speak and vote in the review conferences. In December 1994, Ambassador Chang-Chun Lee, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, was present at the Budapest Summit Meeting. At the Summit, together with the Swedish and Hungarian representatives, the Italian Foreign Minister suggested that South Korea be allowed to act in the OSCE framework on a basis of the same status as Japan. There was a mutual understanding among the three countries Italy, Sweden and Hungary and the two Asian states Japan and Korea that a certain modality of Korean status should be formulated during the year 1995. In December 1995, South Korean Vice Foreign Minister, See-Young Lee, took part in the Fifth Meeting of the Ministerial Council of the OSCE in Budapest. For the first time he had an opportunity to deliver a speech to the audience of the Meeting. According to him, Korea was willing to contribute to the OSCE's international efforts towards peacekeeping and peace-making. But most of all, Koreans were particularly interested in taking a closer look at the possible applicability of OSCE experience to Northeast Asia as a model for future multilateral security co-operation. Along with explaining the ARF as a kind of OSCE in the Asian-Pacific region, he mentioned a possibility to have a subregional security dialogue in Northeast Asia.

In his statement at the OSCE Summit Meeting in December 1996, South Korean Foreign Minister Chong-Ha Yoo was keen to give precise information about the ongoing security situation concerning the Korean peninsula and to strive for an understanding for South Korea's position. It was a good oppor-

7 Cf. Daily Notes on Foreign Minister Han's Comments on Security Dialogue, Department of Security Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 3 March 1994.

tunity for South Korea to attract Europe's attention to the problem of the divided Korea.

A multilateral forum for dialogue on confidence and security building like the OSCE was mentioned as a useful framework to encourage North Korea to come out of its isolation. South Korea takes the contribution of the OSCE in the Yugoslavian conflict for very promising. It also gives a great importance to its association with the OSCE. It has actively participated in all relevant meetings organized by the OSCE. South Korean representatives stressed the close interdependence of European and Northeast Asian security. European states like Sweden, Switzerland and Poland have been contributing in keeping peace on the Korean peninsula as observers of the armistice agreement since the end of the Korean War. The EU is participating in the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) as a member of the Executive Board, pledging an annual contribution of 15 million ECU for five years (1998-2002). High officials of the South Korean government also underlined closer links with all OSCE participating States on the basis of common human values. They suggested that as a member of the community of fundamental values, South Korea actually shares the objectives and principles of the OSCE. The Asia-Europe Meeting 2000 hosted by South Korea in Seoul seemed to express the efforts of the Korean people to become a member of the world community based on common values.

The OSCE started out as a bridge between the two ideologically hostile blocs of the Cold War. But the OSCE model has a limitation in transplanting its concepts to Northeast Asia, where the ideology is no longer a divisive issue, and economics is the primary concern of regional countries, with the sole exception of North Korea. One lesson Northeast Asia should readily draw from the OSCE is that the incremental process is available everywhere. Small steps combine together to build trust and a sense of community among countries. Under the contemporary security circumstances in Northeast Asia where the bilateral alliance arrangements with the US form the bedrock of regional security, and where China and Japan are unlikely to take the burden of leadership, there has not been any momentum to initiate a regional multilateralism. Yet given the interdependent nature of today's world, multilateral consultation and co-operation are requisite measures to complement the bilateral structures. South Korea is now keen to find a way to contribute to a more effective management of the critical uncertainties in Northeast Asia. Fortunately, the ARF provides a good opportunity to share a common interest in seeing the region co-operating and stabilized. While such favourable circumstances exist, the volatile structure surrounding the Korean peninsula must be replaced by a regime of peace and a multilateral consultative mechanism.

Despite some hesitations, for the time being, the benefits of the South Korean engagement policy are evident on the Korean peninsula, which finds itself located at the centre of Northeast Asia. Engagement of China and Russia will actually contribute to creating an atmosphere of building a multilateral fo-

rum. The missile and nuclear policy of North Korea has been a constant concern of the US and Japan, which are unable to remain uninvolved. At the moment, thanks to the co-operative attitudes of North Korea, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction has been contained with some reservations. While the process of mutual engagement in a bilateral context in Northeast Asia continues, any forum for multilateral security co-operation should be created. Confidence and security building must be a first step towards regional stability. Therefore, Northeast Asia has many reasons to learn from the experience of the OSCE, which is a forerunner in this respect.