

Essay Contest for the Hokkaido Conference for North Pacific Issues

Award for Excellence

Creating an Institution for Regional Cooperation in the North Pacific

From Dialogue to Action : Foundations First

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Kim Chong Il is performing radical surgery on the very concept of security in the North Pacific, and it is all our fault. When the KGB declared that Pyongyang had the Bomb in 1990, it was probably disinformatsia, one of the dreaded organization's specialties, but it should have served as a wake-up call for energetic, uncompromising, focused efforts to plant the seeds of cooperation in the region. After all, the KGB comments deserved attention, since they were based on unparalleled Russian knowledge, at least at that date, of the North Korean nuclear program, much of which was educated in or imported from the USSR. Instead of action, thirteen years have passed without the emergence of an enduring structure that can bridge the dangerous chasms that are the heritage of the Cold War in Asia. The Korean divide is one of that confrontation's most enduring legacies, a state of war persisting fifty years after the armistice was signed. With Kim Chong Il fighting for the very survival of his regime, the last of the Stalinist order, no holds are barred. All agree on the high level of menace, citing Kim's unpredictableness or the Bush administration's aggressions (or both). But without any

regional community of interest, each state sees the risks and opportunities differently leading to our present impasse.

If nothing is done, in the next few years, North Korea will have a small arsenal of nuclear weapons and delivery systems as far as Anchorage or even LA. Until that moment, preemptive attacks risk the destruction of Seoul, something the South Korean government wishes to avoid at all costs. This would be an unimaginable catastrophe, possibly with casualty levels far exceeding 9/11. Nonetheless, South Korea, reacted rather calmly to the news of Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions. After all, there is relatively little difference between Seoul being reduced to rubble by five thousand artillery rounds or having the capital blasted and irradiated with comparable casualty counts. Besides, the missile upgrade program suggests that the nuclear bombs are for more distant destinations. For Seoul, it was more important to maintain momentum towards unification and North-South ties than to sound the alarm too loudly.

The United States also reacted by not reacting. Bush administration policy had already reversed the efforts of Clinton's final years in the direction of engagement. The nuclear crisis provided just one more reason not to talk with Kim. In addition, the renewed threat, like the missile test over Japan in 1998, has increased interest in missile defense among US allies in East Asia in a way no arguments by its American proponents could. Prime Minister Koizumi's trip to Pyongyang in 2002 was an important attempt to break the Cold War ice, but it soon succumbed to the powerful images of family drama provoked by the kidnappees' return. North Korea's poor handling of this issue filled the press, preventing any further initiatives with Pyongyang.

Russia continues to complain that they are being left out, citing exclusion from KEDO, the Geneva four-party talks, and the present three-way negotiations, as evidence. But Kim Chong Il may recognize more similarities in Putin's Moscow than in post-Deng Beijing. China, usually portrayed as a close ally of Pyongyang has every reason for concern with the implications of having a nuclear presence within easy Nodong distance of Beijing. It is Chinese aid that is presently keeping Kim afloat, so that to cut it off, regardless of the Bush administration's enticements and Kim's infuriating tactics, would be treason indeed. Pyongyang's reply could be highly punitive. It is these near-term prospects that are probably much on the Chinese mind. In short, with each side focused on something different, the search for a solution to the present crisis is difficult and completely independent of the fundamental measures listed below. . Disarming the present crisis can only aid other, more structural, regional initiatives. Failure will make cooperation harder to achieve, but all the more essential.

At present, I am living in Paris as a Visiting Researcher at the Fondation Robert Schuman and the spectacle of Europe struggling to take the next step in the creation of "an Institution for Regional Cooperation" is right before my eyes. Despite the myriad differences, it would be unwise not to learn something from Europe's half-century of experience with history's largest and most successful regionalization project. In Europe, union ties have gone far to end historical tensions. France and Germany had three major wars in 70 years. Now this seems unthinkable. As a parallel, we can note that China, Japan, Korea and Russia have accumulated much bad blood between them, over the years.

Their armies are indeed still armed, in largest part, against each other. US bombers destroyed almost all of Japan and then North Korea during the wars. US aircraft remain stationed in a broad arc of bases from Alaska to Okinawa. Maybe the European experience can help.

The expansion of the European Union has also been a great force for democratization and other positive reform in the former Communist states of Central Europe. By requiring adhesion to the “communal heritage” of the EU, radical changes in legislation and practice were quickly adopted. In the North Pacific, this effort will be complicated by the mix of Communist, post-Communist and democratic states, but the European experience will certainly provide guidance on where to create “communal interests” and where to expect divergences to be the most trying. After World War II, both the US and Russia had the largest hand in fashioning the “two-camp” system, so their cooperation will be essential to a proper resolution. Certainly, either of them is sufficient to “spoil” any initiative in the region, suggesting inclusion as a key principle for regional institution building.

The capitalized words of the Essay Topic spell out a structure to maximize multifaceted security, while promoting regional prosperity. Each word leads to a specific policy recommendation. Adding them together gives the list of preliminary steps to be taken NOW, to create the environment for and embryo of an institution for regional cooperation in the North Pacific.

1. Action

Indeed, this is the key word, for it is time for deeds as well as words. Any essay submitted without a clear list of immediate policies that can be implemented in the present political environment will not have fulfilled this challenge, driven by the most important word in the NIRA-NORPAC Topic title. Action is difficult without a mission, but fortunately the most basic formulation is acceptable to all parties – **cooperation should lead to increased peace and prosperity for all parties involved**. I suggest one important novelty to this and that is to require all adherents to agree that efforts should be made to **make this causality circular**, e.g., steps that lead to prosperity should be used to strengthen and fund additional cooperative efforts.

We should recognize that this is going to be a long-term process involving steadily increasing transnational integration. In order to strengthen all aspects of transnational contact, we need a catalog of such ties and an analysis of the ways in which they interact. For example, language learning is likely to include travel to countries where the desired language is spoken. Friends made during study-abroad, especially at the professional or pre-professional level, can then become future business contacts or even international spouses. Such statistics exist in a piecemeal and bilateral fashion, but although some efforts have been made to study them (Iwashita, Nakami, Rozman, Wolff), no systemic collection has been undertaken. **Such a database would become a useful tool in tracking strengths and weaknesses in cooperative efforts, while providing a baseline from which to calculate the success of decades of actions to come**. The concept of baseline is especially important for documenting such societies as North Korea's, among the last of a breed. North Korea will certainly experience tremendous change, since all regionalization schemes imply increasing degrees of cross-border

openness and Pyongyang has, by all measures, maintained the most closed regime and society in the world..

Openness should be made a central issue. Ideologically not as problematic as capitalism and democracy, which are not essential to significant regional cooperation, openness is just as corrosive. It should be kept in mind that unlike capitalism and democracy as “imports,” openness is a two-way street, automatically more equitable. Not only will North Koreans experience much of the regional reality that has been hidden from them (although millions of them are smart enough to understand that official broadcasts are not a full accounting), but Japanese and American elites may learn something important about adaptation and resistance to oppressive regimes. If the avoidance of possible totalitarian futures is one of our global goals, then scientific study of North Korea’s recent past is a must. The research group must be international to guarantee both sufficient openness to be effective and inclusion of the multiple perspectives that represent the region’s experience. Much information will only be available to Korean researchers for linguistic and cultural reasons, but views from abroad will benefit from a certain detachment to highlight different aspects of events, aspects that, although possibly alien to Korean history, certainly have their place in the history of the North Pacific. Not only information will flow. Increased cross-border contact means additional dangers, such as a SARS-like epidemic. But greater transnational flows also mean that the information and cooperation necessary for the prevention and containment of outbreaks will be more easily available.

With openness providing ongoing contact and our catalog to provide guidance on where to encourage further cooperation, we will be in a position to derive the list of

individuals, groups and organizations, both national and international, that are involved in the regional cross-fertilization process. Many will be elites involved with foreign policy, trade, finance, communications and education, although such activities as cross-national marriage and childbearing, bilingualism, border relations and international sports are hardly limited to any one class or status group. Broadly speaking, this is the “constituency”, whose real life interests speak in favor of regional cooperation. They are the natural promoters and supporters of initiatives on this issue. **Mobilization of this influential constituency for the cause of regional cooperation is an immediate priority that can be realized as soon as the catalog of present transnational contacts and the minimum of openness necessary for its compilation have been instituted.**

2. Cooperation

With a conscious cohort of influential supports, developments in this direction are assured. There are three kinds of cooperative tasks to be pursued simultaneously. They are mutually-reinforcing. The collusive ties that define our constituency must be expanded, not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively, but making bilateral ties trilateral and trilateral ties multilateral. A second area of cooperation is the prevention, containment and solution of conflictual issues. All governments, as well as individual contributors, should be invited to submit their lists of international disagreements as well as proposed solutions. Problems of a truly regional nature, rather than bilateral issues, should be given priority as their handling will build region-wide problem-solving capacities that will be useful later in tackling problems of more-limited impact. The linkages among the problems should be carefully explored in order to group problems

into problem-complexes, involving multiple regional members. These can more easily be addressed at the regional level. Finally, between collusion and conflict lies the area of competition, that must be left unregulated in order to promote rational investment and efficient production, but that must also be regulated to prevent it from spilling over into conflict. Here we must go beyond zero sum calculations in which every winner must produce a loser to search for win-win scenarios. Some of these will come naturally as matches are made between partners with different natural advantages, who might otherwise choose less profitable competitive alternatives. Furthermore, the potential for constructing additional win-win cooperative ventures can be expanded through judicious regional investment in infrastructure and database projects.

As the most useful way to expand knowledge of the kinds of concrete compromises that need to be made in order to promote multilateral cooperative agreements, a study of the European unification process is proposed and should be accomplished by a multinational expert team (ET) dispatched immediately to Europe to compile a report on the public and behind-the-scenes struggles surrounding the adoption of the European draft constitution. The ET's first report would be due in 2005, after tracking the expansion of the EU from 15 to 25 countries. The mandate could be extended, if necessary. This team should consist of three members from each participating state, guaranteeing necessary multidisciplinary skills. Each team would include an ambassador-level diplomat with European and North Pacific experience in order to guarantee necessary access, a top scholar in European studies, a North Pacific expert with multilingual capacities to assure communication within the ET.

The results of ET construction would be the following: a) a useful study of the most important model for intergovernmental cooperation in the North Pacific; b) the experience of conducting an intergovernmental study among North Pacific states; c) the government and non-government networks created both inside the ET and with European colleagues, possibly leading to a EU role in the development of North Pacific cooperation. China, Japan, Russia, South Korea and the US should be prepared to sponsor Mongolian and North Korean participation in this endeavor.

If either Beijing or Pyongyang refuses to participate, Taipei and/or capable refugees from North Korea, should be invited to replace them *ex officio*, in order to make best efforts to include all perspectives. This is a less desirable outcome, but no one nation should be allowed to believe that it can hold up the multilateral desire for regional cooperation.

3. Creating

This is the word I am least in favor of. I prefer “promote and coordinate” for, in the practice of international relations, it is extremely difficult to create anything out of nothing, except ideas (and essays). Therefore, I prefer to focus more on the preexisting factors well-disposed towards regional cooperation and strengthen their role. I have already discussed this methodology above.

In the realm of ideas, we do need to be creative, especially in order to clear away layers of historical misunderstanding in the North Pacific. This is a long-term task that is best left to the historians, since that is exactly the means of removing these bitter issues from the political process. To begin this process, and it will take a while, since historians

are notoriously slow workers, we need to pick one cooperative historical project that will mobilize positive propaganda and goodwill in each of the countries involved, while developing a public appetite for further cooperation of this kind. Momentum from a first success should be used to fund other historical “blank spots” and “stumbling points” that are less likely to produce total consensus and good feeling.

I propose a full accounting of the human losses of the Korean War, in a broad sense from 1950 until today, that includes American, Chinese, Korean and UN soldiers, Soviet pilots and Japanese hostages. My proposal focuses on the recovery of remains and information about the death or disappearance of the victims. This not only limits the numbers of actual cases to be pursued to something manageable, but also involves all of the countries in the region. This proposal is not really a “creation,” since the US Department of Defense POW-MIA Recovery Unit has already conducted 24 missions in cooperation with North Korea in search of US war-dead remains, prior to the project’s suspension after the October 2002 unveiling of the ongoing Korean nuclear programs. This program would be re-instituted as a regional initiative with the search list expanded to include sites of Korean, Chinese and Russian war-dead and Japanese hostages.

In addition to the symbolic power of this multilateral expression of respect for the “enemy dead,” certain concrete advantages would accrue. First, this gives Kim Chong Il a second chance to provide a more satisfactory accounting and/or apologies to the Japanese public. This, at least, re-opens the possibility for Japanese initiative vis-à-vis Pyongyang, a possibility that has been bottled-up, since Koizumi’s advance mired down in the drama and trauma of the kidnappee issue. Secondly, this initiative should be structured to

increase openness into areas of North Korea rarely exposed to foreign presence. Thirdly, all governments would have to commit to open daily coverage of these salvage operations in the press. All populations need to follow in detail the process of jointly burying the dead. This will help change regional attitudes in more cooperative directions. Finally, since the successful accomplishment of this mission involves close cooperation among diplomatic, military, scientific and press representatives, along with area studies experts and translators, the organizational experience will be invaluable for the creation of larger scale institutions with broader mandates in the near future.

4. Dialogue

The crucial correctness of this formulation is that it directs us away “from Dialogue”. It is not that dialogue is a bad thing, but, on one hand, it needs to be systematically converted into trios and quartets, moving towards regional thinking. On the other hand, even with “action” taking priority both in focus and budget, dialogue is still essential for working out historical insults and injuries, since most of these were inflicted in a bilateral manner.

Under “creative,” I discussed the role of the historians and here I wish to give them a two specific tasks to be undertaken by one multinational committee with representatives from all the nations involved, hopefully armed with commitments from their governments to be forthcoming with documents vital to the writing of regional history. The first task is the writing of a regional history, charged with avoiding the “least common denominator” approach to shared history in which contentious and disagreeable events are simply discarded in the name of efficiency and bygones. As the recent flame

up around Eto Takami shows, the Chinese and Koreans are not about to forget without a thorough bilateral accounting. The former announced that “attempts to distort or deny history would be unsuccessful,” while the latter “once again emphasized that without Japan’s correct understanding of history, it is difficult to sincerely develop relations between the two countries.” Although any two, or even three, historians might reach an easy compromise on events involving their own country’s bilateral or trilateral events, with representatives from every country in the region, it will be harder to cut side deals. All the difficult issues will come out.

This is where the committee’s second task begins. Under the guidance of the whole committee, the two or three countries most concerned will work out compromise language for the thorniest issues, while compiling documentary studies combining primary source materials from both sides. Each country will have the opportunity to invite a counterpart to discuss divisive events from their shared past. **The result of this discussion will be a regional secondary school textbook and a more annotated version to be used as a teacher’s manual, including special study aids for the delicate issues. This book could be titled “The Pre-History of the North Pacific” for regions, like countries, cannot be durable without deep historical roots, either real or imagined.**

5. Institution

I gave myself the task of providing policy recommendations for immediate enactment, since for now the establishment of a full-scale regional institution in the North Pacific with sufficient mandate to be of value seems improbable. The US, though on the record

for a regional solution in Korea, is presently fully occupied with affairs in the Middle East. It would be unrealistic to expect a major initiative from Washington in this region at this time. And what nation can make such a proposal in a convincing manner without first getting the opinions and concerted approval of the Americans?

In the meantime, four concrete projects, for 5-10 years, are provided above in bold.

- 1) Making a database of potential constituents for a North Pacific region with intent to mobilize this constituency for future regional goals;
- 2) The establishment of a regional operation led by military-to-military cooperation to collect and honor the remains and memories of POWS, MIAs, hostages, kidnappees, and victims of terror during the still-unended Korean War;
- 3) Sending a joint delegation to Europe to study closely the next few years of European reform and enlargement; this will create a body of knowledge and core of experts on all the complexity of joining liberal democracies and post-Communist states into viable regional entities. It will also create valuable ties between the North Pacific and the Europe-makers, valuable because the makers of the North Pacific may yet be able to profit from Europe's experience by hiring needed expertise, imitating smart moves, and avoiding pitfalls, all too visible in hindsight.
- 4) Removing some of history's passionately thorny issues from the political agenda by turning them over to a multinational commission of historians to pronounce upon and write jointly acceptable versions of these events to be included in regional secondary school textbooks. All nations should apologize to the others

for obviously bad behavior. Nations addressed with apologies should be gracious in acceptance.

These measures can create the environment within which a more far-reaching institutionalization of North Pacific cooperation could take root.

The very concept of a “North Pacific region” implies the need to include both Russia and the United States in all new institutions. On the other hand, these great powers with predominant interests outside the region, highlight both the weaknesses and the opportunities of the ambiguous regional concept.

6. North

For several centuries now, the “northern problem” in Japanese has meant Russian problems. The rapid, planned settlement of Hokkaido in the 1870s was based on this concern, as was Japan’s fateful rise to regional power in 1904-5, a century ago. Commemoration of that war in the next two years will provide a new opportunity to move towards a shared understanding of an event shared long ago from widely differing perspectives. Also, if one wants to take an optimistic view on prosperity in this region, additional energy resources will be needed. Thus, bringing in Russia sooner rather than later makes sense, given the lead-time on energy infrastructure projects. If North Pacific is the intended term of reference, then the Russians need to be included.

At the same moment that Japan's rise gave notice that key decisions would not only be made in Europe and America, arguably the beginning of global history, united, independent Korea disappeared from the world stage. More than any other issue, this is the one that haunts possibilities for large-scale regional cooperation, since no one has a clear idea what to expect from an entity that has been gone for a century. A medium-sized state of 70 million hard-working citizens with a strong sense of national worth, could go in several directions. "A second Japan" or "A second China" highlight different aspects of successful variants, but "economic basket-case" or "war zone" are real possibilities, if unification scenarios go awry. The region must be ready to help and in a decade when the concrete cooperations mentioned above have produced a cohort of the regional-minded, the capacity to aid Korean unification processes will be greatly enhanced.

7. Pacific

This means including the United States, because otherwise we would talk about Northeast Asia. Since the 1930s, the core of American foreign policy has been to prevent the consolidation of territory into major blocs to which US economic power does not have access. Such regional conglomerations could eventually represent challenges to American power.

Clearly, the US needs to sense that North Pacific regional cooperation will give American interests their due. Otherwise, a fledgling organization could face the kind of reaction that Europe's exclusion of Genetically Modified Organisms from its market has provoked in the United States. It is true that the loss of market share for Monsanto plays a

role in the outrage, but the idea of sealed markets adds to it by producing a diplomatic knee-jerk of great magnitude in Washington. And there is still more than a grain of wisdom to this vision of the world.

Pacific also means peaceful.

8. Regional

The scope should be as wide as reasonably possible, certainly including Canada, China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Russia and the US. The fact that only parts of some of these nations lie within the North Pacific suggests that subnational areas, such as the Japan Sea Rim or the US West Coast, the Russian Far East or Northeast China, must be given increased initiative and resources to pursue integration of the transnational region. The difficulties of cooperation in the North Pacific demand efforts from participants at all levels of contact, while the ambiguities in defining “region” can offer new opportunities for action.