



**Summary Report  
The Tokyo Colloquium  
February 1, 2018  
Building Stable Peace in Northeast Asia:  
Managing and Transforming Risks on the Korean Peninsula**

Organizers: Toda Peace Institute, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, New Zealand.

The 2018 2nd Tokyo Colloquium brought regional experts on peace and security in Northeast Asia together with policy makers and civil society organizations from US, China, Korea and Japan to discuss how to ensure stable peace in Northeast Asia.

The colloquium identified some of the forces generating insecurity, and turbulence in the region. There was a particular focus on ways in which existential nuclear threat in the Korean peninsula could be dealt with through preventive diplomacy, dialogue and negotiations.

Two panels of influential experts and policy makers were organised to share their insights and wisdom on these questions. A session focused on nuclear threats to the Northeast Asia region and the prerequisites for achieving a negotiated solution to the problems posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile programmes.

**Prospects for Peaceful, Negotiated Resolution to the North Korean Nuclear Crisis**

One of the panellists representing U.S. State Department views stressed that the United States is committed to a 'peaceful and credible negotiated resolution' of the North Korean nuclear crisis and would exhaust these options before considering a pre-emptive military strike on North Korea. The U.S. does not want regime change or accelerated reunification. Nor does it wish to place any U.S. troops above the DMZ. The current US strategy is to apply maximum pressure to persuade North Korea to denuclearize, although there is little likelihood that North Korea is considering this as a serious option. On the other hand, North Korea's agreement to resume inter-Korean discussions, manifest most clearly in Kim Jong Un's New Year address and his Pyeongchang Olympic games' charm offensive, seems to owe more to quiet diplomatic efforts and back channel discussions than sanctions. None of us will know which strategy was more effective until there is a chance to ask North Korean policy makers directly.

Some panellists felt that insistence by the U.S. and its allies on ‘denuclearization’ as the prerequisite for negotiations did not create a positive environment for preventive diplomacy and negotiations. It was also felt that it would not result in North Korea’s shift from an expansion of its nuclear capacity to the development of a prosperous economy. Until there is a willingness to negotiate without preconditions, the risk of an accidental war involving North Korea will persist. At the moment, there are some fundamental differences between the priorities of the U.S., South Korea, and Japan. The U.S. and Japan want to focus on maximum pressure, sanctions, defense and deterrence, while South Korea wants to create space for dialogue followed by sanctions, defense, and deterrence.

At some stage, however, it is clear that there is no real alternative to direct talks with North Korea. Preventive diplomacy, therefore, must come before any military option is considered. Despite President Trump’s provocative rhetoric, the United States, at an ‘official’ level is committed to a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

A number of different policy dilemmas challenging a negotiated solution to division on the Korean peninsula were identified. There is a need to analyze the Six Party Talks, in particular, each country’s agreement/disagreement on the preconditions needed to resolved the nuclear issue in North Korea. The table below indicates key national actors’ positions on the following five policy dilemmas:

- 1) Denuclearized Korean Peninsula vs. North Korea denuclearization
- 2) Democratic North Korea vs. persistence of the Kim dynasty
- 3) Prosperous North Korea vs. impoverished North Korea
- 4) Uniform vs Separate regimes federated
- 5) Peaceful solution vs. Military solution

## Unification Score Card

	China	DPRK	Japan	ROK	Russia	US
Denuclearized	△	✘	◎	◎	△	○
Democratic	×	✘	◎	◎	×	◎
Prosperous	○	◎	○	◎	○	○
Uniform	△	◎	◎	◎	○	○
Peacefully	○	△	◎	◎	○	△

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- ◎ = strongly in favor of
- = in favor of
- △ = neither nor
- ✘ = against

## Relative Utility of Tools

	China	DPRK	Japan	ROK	Russia	US
Sanctions	△	✘	◎	○	△	◎
Pressure	×	✘	◎	○	×	◎
Deterrence	×	✘	◎	◎	×	◎

### ➤ Assumptions

- Regime stays as it is.
- Denuclearization unachieved.
- No military option.

### ➤ Joseph Nye; 'Soft Power'

- ① Military threat, ② Bribe, ③ Soft power

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It is clear that the dilemmas confronting East Asia are what can be described as ‘wicked problems.’ These are problems that are difficult or impossible to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements that are often difficult to recognize. The use of the term ‘wicked’ reflects inherent resistance to resolution, rather than evil. East Asian nuclear problems are of this character. The first challenge is how to initiate fruitful discussions and negotiations about regional incompatibilities. The second is to acknowledge some challenging political realities (e.g. the inability of external parties to force regime change in the DPRK). The third problem relates to the fact that the DPRK has effectively crossed the nuclear threshold and it is notoriously difficult to put the nuclear genie back into the bottle once this happens. Insisting on denuclearisation as a prerequisite for negotiations only compounds this problem. Fourth, all security and military analysts agree that there is no military solution that will not have disastrous consequences, which raises some important questions about what lies after ‘maximum pressure’ if there is no compliance from the DPRK and no one from the United States tasked with taking advantage of negotiating opportunities that might flow from the maximum pressure.

### **Incremental Denuclearization of North Korea A Window of Opportunity?**

If denuclearization based on a grand bargain is out of reach for the near future, then the next approach is to consider a longer-term strategy to manage nuclear risk and initiate steps towards incremental denuclearization. It is always a bad idea to prevent a war by starting a war. For example, now that the DPRK has finished a round of ICBM tests it might be willing to offer a Hwasong-15 ICBM moratorium. Nuclear deterrence, for example, does not require 100% reliability of the nuclear weapons. China for a long time relied on a very small number of rudimentary nuclear ballistic missiles as a strategic deterrent. If North Korea’s goal is to make the world accept its nuclear weapons then accepting a freeze on a small number of warheads for the purposes of strategic deterrence is an incremental step forward. In his New Year’s Address, Kim Jong Un declared that the DPRK would mass produce warheads and missiles, however, it is technically difficult for them to develop more advanced nuclear weapons and it would further damage an already challenged economy. This is an important opportunity, therefore, for the world community to discern whether North Korea might be willing to exercise some self-restraint in return for some positive incentives, e.g. some sanctions relief or targeted economic support. If those states with an interest in North Korea’s nuclear programme can persuade North Korea to restrict further development of its weapon systems and more advanced ICBMs this would be a goal worth pursuing en route to wider discussions about nuclear stability or more optimally a nuclear free Northeast Asia.

The recent inter-Korean rapprochement and sidebar negotiations at Pyeongchang coupled with smaller scale DPRK winter training/exercises may be indicators of North Korea’s willingness to pursue conciliatory gestures. Neighboring countries should respond to these positive signals with incremental steps. For example, if the DPRK could agree to 1) No missile overfly of Japan and ROK, the U.S. and its allies could agree to no B-1B flights into or near the DPRK airspace. Similarly, 2) If the DPRK could agree to no nuclear and missile tests in exchange for scaled down joint exercises by US, Japan and South Korea this would be relatively easy to verify. If cheating were detected, the other party could resume its previous activity. A more ambitious goal may be the suspension of DPRK fissile material production with appropriate verification in return for some sanctions relief. The unwillingness of the United States and its close allies to consider these reciprocated gestures

reduces the number of available options and generates dilemmas that flow out of the maximum pressure strategy.

### **Problems with the Maximum Pressure Approach**

The Trump administration has led a campaign of ‘maximum pressure’ against North Korea. This has prompted many countries to join the U.S. in isolating North Korea diplomatically and economically. One of the panelists argued that there are three problems with this maximum pressure approach.

- 1) It undermines the credibility of the United States’ ‘4 No’s’ approach. This is because the logic of successful maximum pressure strategy will threaten the survivability of the Kim regime. This forces North Korea to choose between denuclearization or regime change.
- 2) Maximum pressure can lead to two possible options a) North Korea will back down and make major concessions on nuclear weapons, or b) force it to behave in an even more provocative manner. The latter is more likely as they have higher stakes in the game.
- 3) As sanctions continue, civilian suffering in North Korea will increase and this will pose greater moral pressure on the international community. How long can we continue maximum pressure without being responsible for widespread internal suffering in the DPRK.

If we insist on denuclearization as a prerequisite for negotiations, tit-for-tat competition will continue, leading to an inevitable increase in the risk of accidental or intentional war. This is high stakes risk-taking that is qualitatively different from other threats against the DPRK. This time there is 1) a higher risk of nuclear conflict and 2) deep misunderstanding of North Korean intentions because of a lack of an open relationship and positive engagement with the North. Although denuclearization is an important goal, preventing any kind of war in North East Asia is equally important.

### **Normalizing Relations with North Korea**

As mentioned earlier, North Korea has crossed the nuclear threshold and is now in the stage of fine-tuning its nuclear weapons and long-range delivery methods. It is clear that it will not be easy to persuade North Korea to give up their nuclear weapons now. The unconditional red line for U.S., Japan, and South Korea, however, is North Korea’s complete denuclearization. The challenge facing these countries is what they can offer North Korea to bring them to the negotiating table. The prospects for convening a meeting while insisting on denuclearization seem slight.

The majority of the panelists agreed that normalizing relations with North Korea was an imperative and that ‘relationships need to be transformed first.’ To do this requires close attention to historical animosities and a reframing of threat perceptions so that direct engagement with North Korea is somewhat normalized. The relationship building initiated at the winter Olympics, for example, needs to be continued and deepened. This will only be possible, however, if the United States and its allies are willing to mute their antagonistic relationships with the North in order to create and respond to opportunities for constructive dialogue. If there is a genuine commitment to no regime change, then it is important that the US, Japan and the ROK work to generate confidence rather than fear between all parties with

interests in the region. If this means accepting North Korea's nuclear capability in the short term so that North Korea can feel more self-confident and secure, this could lead to 'mutual confidence' between old antagonists. This is arguably a much better platform for raising nuclear status issues and denuclearization than instilling maximum anxiety through maximum pressure.

The U.S could have normalized its relations with the DPRK, signed a peace treaty and stopped the country from going down the nuclear path twenty years ago. In 1999, William Perry, the former U.S. defense secretary crafted a comprehensive proposal to present to the North Korean government. This involved normalization of relations between North Korea and the United States and was designed to improve relations so that North Korea might be motivated to become a 'normal nation' again. This bargaining failed because the commitments between the two sides were asymmetrical. North Korea was willing to ignore the asymmetries in return for strong security guarantees. When the agreement failed, the DPRK's distrust towards the U.S. grew, making it difficult for any bargain to be realized. This memory undoubtedly affects perceptions of current relationships today.

There is, therefore, a strong need to restore a mechanism or multiple mechanisms for dialogue between parties. In this context it might be useful to reexamine whether the Six Party framework is the best option for negotiation. There are some hopeful signs which need to be built on after the Olympics. To maintain this current window of opportunity it is important that the U.S., South Korea and Japan extend the postponement of their military exercises in order not to generate an excuse for North Korean nuclear provocation.

### **Facilitating Direct Engagement and Building Trust**

North Korea is paranoid because it has been labeled a pariah state; George Bush even included it as one of the countries in his 'axis of evil.' This demonization results in the North Korean regime becoming more solitary and 'hermitic' with relatively impenetrable borders and high levels of internal secrecy. This makes 'normal' negotiations somewhat problematic. Many panelists felt that it may be useful to compare North Korea with China before it was recognized by the international community. It was diplomatic recognition in the 1970s that enabled China to open itself to the world. Despite the fact that China is more open and an integral part of the new world order, Chinese perception of the United States continues to be wary and distrustful. North Korea's negative perception of the United States is far greater than that of China. If no effort is put into restoring trust and changing the threat perceptions of North Korean leaders this will be a major impediment to stability in Northeast Asia. From that standpoint, it is important to nurture the North-South inter-Korea dialogue in order to boost communication, cooperation and confidence between both Koreas. This has already resulted in the opening of hotlines of communication between the militaries on both sides. Despite its bellicose rhetoric, the US has made it clear that it welcomes these developments.

What drives North Korea's threat perception is its concerns about the strategic intentions of the United States and South Korea. One effective confidence building measure would be to arrange more high level official meetings between North and South Korea and between the North and the United States. These encounters undoubtedly enable North Korea to see how it might coexist with South Korea. As mentioned above, negotiations about denuclearization would be more realistic when mutual confidence levels have been raised and North Korea is no longer viewed principally as an 'evil' or 'despicable' nation. Increased direct engagement

and multiple negotiations are the best hope to change North Korea's threat perception of others.

### **Confidence building in East Asia**

Cooperation between the U.S., Japan, South Korea and China has never been so critical as now. All of these major powers, however, have different threat perceptions towards North Korea which impede security cooperation between them in the region. Many of these threat perceptions and a continued lack of basic trust between all five countries are generated by contemporary dynamics but they are exacerbated by painful territorial and historical memory issues.

One of the panelists stated that since the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute in 2012, Sino-Japanese relations have warmed up but they can still be characterized as cold. Wide perception gaps continue because of a resurgence of nationalist rhetoric and sensational media coverage in both China and Japan. There is a need to reinforce fragile political relations through efforts to promote more robust exchanges in the areas of the economy, culture and non-traditional security. It was suggested that one such collaborative possibility was Japan's support of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In late 2017, the Japanese government announced its willingness to provide financial assistance to Japanese companies doing business with China as part of the BRI. China may condition the future improvement of bilateral ties on how much concrete cooperation Japan will give to the BRI.

Fixation on antagonistic bilateral relationships inhibits diplomats and political leaders from thinking creatively about the development of regional security architecture within which each country would start making contributions to the security of the whole region. Although it seems far fetched at the moment, the development of regional security and defense mechanisms based on collaborative rather than confrontational alliances and underpinned by concepts of cooperative and common security could be an important circuit breaker for the region.

If China and Japan, for example, could make joint non-intervention and non-aggression declarations as symbolic confidence building measures and if they could develop proposals for maritime codes of conduct addressing the use of force in resolving maritime and other territorial disputes, this would do wonders for the creation of trust and confidence between these two economic hegemonies and for the Korean Peninsula as well. To move in this direction would involve more attention being paid to commonalities rather than differences. If all East Asian countries could build on their rich and common cultural heritage, then the prospects for building peaceful relationships, developing clear communication channels and focusing on ways of building confidence and respect rather than fear and demonization would be enhanced significantly.

Moving in this direction would create a positive environment for a resumption of summit meetings between leaders and a willingness to boost confidence by sharing threat perceptions, military doctrines and strategies within a regional security framework. Even though this aspiration seems remote at the moment, having it as a vision could help reframe the bilateral antagonisms that continue to bedevil stable peace in Northeast Asia.