

Regional Models of Security Cooperation

Which Style of Security Cooperation for Northeast Asia?

A Comparison of Europe and Southeast Asia

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1. Emerging Security Multilateralism in Northeast Asia

Multilateralism in Asia has often been called an oxymoron however, the two recently proposed multilateral security processes indicate new-found interest in multilateral security cooperation for Northeast Asia. South Korea has proposed the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI) and China has proposed a new multilateral security process based on the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA). What explains the increased interest in security multilateralism in Northeast Asia? Why do countries propose these “oxymoronic” processes?

One answer is due to the existing mechanisms for peace and security in Northeast Asia that prove increasingly costly and irrelevant, with an additional exasperation of the security dilemma. For example, the ROK-US alliance has been effective in deterring North Korea from a conventional attack on the South, but is becoming increasingly irrelevant in deterring the North from a cyber or nuclear attack on the South (or even on the United States). The North has already launched successful cyber attacks on South Korean and US targets (such as Sony Pictures Entertainment). A capable North Korean ICBM or SLBM threat that can reach a US mainland target will cast doubt on the credibility of US nuclear umbrella and the very existence of the ROK-US alliance. An effective ROK-US alliance is unable to force the North to denuclearize or provide incentive to implement regime change on the contrary, past behavior by the North indicates that a strong ROK-US alliance is likely to harden rather than soften the North Korea's stance. Efforts to strengthen and the ROK-US alliance in response to new threats from the North agitate China and exasperate the security dilemma between the US

and North Korea as well as between the US and China.

Existing security mechanisms prove insufficient while new security risks multiply and a natural impulse to “fix” existing security measures. Consequently, ideas on a multilateral security process or a multilateral security architecture that can offer an efficient or effective solution have nearly simultaneously appeared in South Korea and China.

2. Europe vs Southeast Asia

The challenge for Northeast Asia is that the region lacks successful precedents of multilateral security cooperation to build on. The Six-Party Talks may be what comes closest to a precedent of multilateral security cooperation in the region, but the talks have been stalled for years without any progress towards DPRK denuclearization. Quite the contrary, North Korea has developed a viable nuclear threat to the United States despite six rounds of Six-Party Talks.

No successful precedents in Northeast Asia have led to an analysis of paradigms found outside of Northeast Asia that can provide a successful security cooperation precedent to emulate. The search for a successful precedent has always placed Europe at the top of the list. Multilateral security cooperation in Europe, as embodied in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and later in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), has inspired Northeast Asia ever since the Helsinki Final Act was signed in 1975.

Multilateral security cooperation in Europe is an inspiration for Northeast Asia as well as the rest of the world despite current OSCE shortcomings such as the Ukrainian crisis. However, is it possible for Europe to offer a practical road-map on where Northeast Asia should go as well as how to get there, despite differences in history, geography, and culture?

3. Southeast Asian Style of Multilateral Security Cooperation

The success of Europe has overshadowed the successful examples of Southeast Asia multilateral security cooperation. At the beginning of the 1990's, there was almost no multilateral security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. Now, war among ASEAN countries is unimaginable due to the multiple layers of security cooperation that exist between ASEAN countries. Southeast Asia's equivalent of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the ASEAN Regional Forum, draws participants from Southeast Asia and beyond.

The end of the Cold War helped Southeast Asia achieve multilateral security cooperation in such a short period of time despite the virtual absence of multilateralism. Improved relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, with the subsequent peaceful dissolution of the Soviet Union, removed significant tension from inter-state relations in Asia as well as in Europe. With the Cold War over, old lines of cleavages suddenly became less salient ideological differences, for instance, did not continue to pit countries against one another. The Cold War created a global phenomenon that was not specific to Southeast Asia. We also need region-specific factor (or factors) to explain the emergence of security multilateralism in Southeast Asia.

One unique feature in multilateral security cooperation in Southeast Asia is the prominent role of Track 2 diplomacy seen in the informal policy dialogue between experts and officials in their private capacities. A loose but influential network of experts in Southeast Asia advocated multilateral security cooperation consequently, frequent policy dialogues between officials and experts created multilateral security cooperation ideas that came to be accepted and implemented as actual policies by governments in the region.

There were also notable activists and experts in Western Europe who called for denuclearization or disarmament in the 1960's and 1970's however, their message was subdued due to the context of the Cold War. These activists were also not officially involved in negotiations between the West and the East in the run-up to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe that revolved around intergovernmental talks by ambassadors and political principals. Southeast Asia had a different experience where security experts played a critical role. The combination of an active transnational epistemic community advocating cooperative security and receptive national governments was the key to success for multilateral security cooperation in Southeast Asia. This combination was not necessarily truly unique to Southeast Asia. Peter Haas' study on the Mediterranean Action Plan indicated that an ecological epistemic community played a similarly crucial role in international efforts to fight marine pollution in the Mediterranean Sea in the 1970's. Epistemic communities that Peter Haas has found and Track 2 diplomacy in Southeast Asia point to the same phenomenon of interaction between experts and officials: Cooperation occurs when knowledge and power are joined.

4. Which Style of Security Cooperation for Northeast Asia?

Each region indicates a different road to multilateral security cooperation in Northeast Asia. The European case shows that the road to multilateral security cooperation can be active Track 1 diplomacy or intergovernmental multilateral talks. The Southeast Asian case shows that the road to multilateral security cooperation can be vibrant Track 1 diplomacy or security epistemic community.

The problem so far has been the superfluous examination of Southeast Asia. We have overtly focused on Europe despite differences between Europe and Northeast Asia and difficulties of Track 1 diplomacy in Northeast Asia. Official diplomacy in Northeast Asia is currently “dysfunctional.” Official diplomacy between South and North Korea is almost non-existent with scarce official interaction. Any official bilateral diplomacy among South Korea, China and Japan is also at a low point. A recent trilateral summit held in Seoul demonstrated the difficulty of gathering the leaders of China, Japan, and South Korea, let alone providing any meaningful progress on issues that require trilateral cooperation. Relations between the United States and China are more strained than ever since the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. The current dismal state of intergovernmental relations shows that the Track 1 road to regional security cooperation will be long and arduous.

It is important to study and try to replicate the Southeast Asian style of multilateral security cooperation in Northeast Asia in addition to CSCE/OSCE-style of security cooperation. It is also important to recognize that the Track 2 road will have problems. The experience of Southeast Asia and the Mediterranean indicates the need for a vibrant transnational epistemic community that can successfully implement international cooperation. Unlike Southeast Asia or the Mediterranean, the security epistemic community in Northeast Asia is weak and fragmented along national lines.

The underdevelopment of a transnational epistemic community in Northeast Asia is a similar setback to multilateral security cooperation akin to dysfunctional Track 1 diplomacy. However, it is important to realize that Southeast Asia did not have vibrant Track 2 diplomacy until the early 1990s. For instance, ASEAN ISIS was officially launched in 1988 with the signing of its charter. In 1991, just three years after the ASEAN ISIS was officially formed, ASEAN ISIS made a proposal to start a regional security dialogue titled “A Time for Initiative.” This proposal was accepted by governments in Southeast Asia and the ASEAN Regional Forum was born. ASEAN ISIS soon created a loose network of experts to advise and support the ASEAN Regional Forum: Council for Security and Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP). The experience of Southeast Asia shows that the transnational epistemic community can develop over a relative short period of time with a newly formed epistemic community that can have a big impact.

5. Implications for NAPCI

Europe has long provided East Asia a model for economic integration and security cooperation. The ongoing financial crisis in Europe has led an increasing number of East Asians to rethink the European style of economic integration however, not so for security cooperation. Despite the crisis in Ukraine, Europe is still an inspiration and model for security cooperation for a large number of East Asians.

Europe is and will remain an inspiration for security cooperation. However, this brief paper argues that Southeast Asia may be actually more relevant for Northeast Asia than Europe as a model. Like Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia lacked strong multilateralism despite the substantial and rapid progress in security cooperation since the 1990's. Strong Track 2 diplomacy (or a vibrant security epistemic community) is the key to Southeast Asia's success. If this analysis is right, what NAPCI needs to promote is not so much Track 1 diplomacy as Track 2 diplomacy. NAPCI needs to be more than government-to-government diplomacy and requires the engagement and empowerment of security experts who share a common vision of multilateral security cooperation.

** An earlier version of this essay was presented at the KSCES-JPI joint conference titled "The Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative and the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula" held in Seoul on November 27th, 2015 in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. The views expressed here are those of the author and do not reflect the position of the Jeju Peace Institute.*

December 11, 2015

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