

## THE TWO KOREAS AND NORTHEAST ASIA: HOW CAN WE MOVE FORWARD?

### Trust-building Process and Inter-Korean Relations

The current security situation in Northeast Asia is fluctuating greatly, making it more difficult to be predicted. The situation indicates a 'return of geopolitics' on both the global and regional levels. Indeed, the United States is pursuing a strategic rebalancing and China is now more rigorous in asserting itself in regional affairs as well as its claim for a 'New Type of Great Power Relationship'. This has resulted in growing tensions and competition in Asia Pacific.

*Trustpolitik  
is the key for  
trust-building  
process in  
the Korean  
Peninsula and  
the Northeast  
Asian Peace and  
Cooperation  
Initiative.....*



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Under Kim Jong Un's leadership, North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile provocations pose continuous and unpredictable threats to the Republic of Korea. North Korea seemed to be successful in diversifying its nuclear arsenal as well as in miniaturising its nuclear warheads and developing a more light-weight warhead. Since early 2014, North Korea has test fired up to 110 short to medium range missiles around the Korean Peninsula. As North Korea is trying to move out of its political and economic isolation, a changing pattern of its relationship with close allies is now more evident. North Korea has decreased its dependency on China and is now pursuing a greater bond with Russia.



*From left: Dr Bilveer Singh, Mr Pou Sothirak, Dr Sang Hyun Lee, and Mr Khin Maung Lynn*

This intense phenomenon has given birth to a new policy concept created by President Park Geun-hye of South Korea called *trustpolitik*. The concept of *trustpolitik* is President Park's administration's effort in changing the current Northeast Asian region situation of mounting tensions and forceful competition to a more peaceful and cooperative region. This concept of trust is emphasised on all levels of society; trust among Korean people, trust among politicians, trust among the two Koreas, trust among Korea and other nations of the region, and also trust among Korea and the global community. Hence, *trustpolitik* has been the basis of the trust-building process between the North and the South, and also serves as one of the pillars of South Korea's foreign policy.

South Korea firmly believes that the peace and stability of the Northeast Asian region is parallel to the peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula. There have been numerous ups and downs in the relationship between the two Koreas. The continuous vicious cycle of provocation leads to crisis, followed by dialogues and compromise until another round of provocation breaks out. To break this cycle in inter-Korean relations, South Korea is applying dynamic approaches that encompass both soft and hard alignment approaches towards the North.

Having considered past policies, President Park crafted the *trustpolitik* with both countries' strengths and limitations in mind. The aim of this trust-building process is to ensure the existence of a reliable national security while establishing peace on the Korean Peninsula. This is to lay the groundwork for eventual unification. Although previous policies have helped to reinforce a cooperative relationship between the North and the South, some principles have been compromised along the way. While some principle-based policies have resulted in more consistency, they saw the lack of flexibility. By integrating the strengths of each approach, South Korea is utilising both hard and soft-line policies. Both dialogues and pressures will be applied to North Korea in order to help it make choices towards the right direction.

It would be interesting to observe the evolution of the trust-building processes and the two Koreas' domestic politics. North Korea's social, political and economic backwardness could halt the unification processes as South Korea's development in all areas is tremendously higher and at different levels compared to the North. Other than the absence of an aligned mutual inter-Korean ideology policy, the two also lack a sturdy regional unification architecture that will not only reassure North Korea, but South Korea as well. A tangible measure instrument for the unification process is needed to ensure that the whole effort of trust-building will not end up as mere utopia.



*Dr Siviengphet Phetvorasack*

Although North Korea has come off as the negative party in the trust-building process, it has not abandoned the effort to establish good relations with other countries. North Korea's initiative in re-establishing its relationship with Myanmar in 2007 has proven that ASEAN should step up as a neutral middle actor to bring the two Koreas together. ASEAN, through its various mechanisms such as the ARF, can be instrumental in easing tensions between the North and the South.

Inter-Korean relations have always been discussed and debated on a government to government level for decades but changes have not been evident. Perhaps South Korea should now diversify its efforts and not only focus on the higher level of initiatives but also look into people-to-people bonding efforts. Nonetheless, the unification of the two Koreas is possible except that the time frame of the process ought to be closely observed.

### **Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative**

The Northeast Asian region is expected to serve as a locomotive for world economy as it accounts for 20 per cent of the global economy; the region includes the second and third largest economy in the world. Despite the growing interdependence among regional partners, the political security tensions have worsened. In fact, the major regional order is going through a transformation — a rising assertive China, a resurgent Japan, North Korea which is pursuing economic development and nuclear weapons, and the US rebalancing or pivoting to Asia.



*Mr Sang-hwa Lee*

There is a severe mismatch between economic interdependence and political and security cooperation in the region known as the 'Asian Paradox' phenomenon. In such circumstances, regional confidence building measures have yet to be developed in the Northeast Asian region. Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI) is a process for the building of an order of multilateral cooperation and trust based on a realistic understanding of reality. The initiative seeks to build an infrastructure of trust and establish a culture of dialogue and cooperation in Northeast Asia.

The NAPCI is South Korea's attempt to overcome the Asian Paradox, where 'trust deficit' lies at the heart of the problem. The objectives of NAPCI are: (i) to accumulate a practice of dialogue and cooperation; (ii) to lay the foundation for sustainable peace and prosperity; and (iii) to encourage Pyongyang's participation in the international community. Cooperation will begin with non-traditional security issues and gradually expand to cover traditional security issues.

The problems in Northeast Asia include regional conflicts, conflicts in the Korean Peninsula, Korea-Japan conflict, Japan-China conflict, and China-US conflict. There are several main causes of conflicts in Northeast Asia. The key cause of these conflicts is clearly distrust, and this is what NAPCI will have to deal with. Table 1 lists the causes and suggested possible solutions.





*Dr Prapat Thepchatree*

It is important to bear in mind that NAPCI will be a companion, not a contender, to the present bilateral and multilateral regional cooperation. Indeed, cooperation with ASEAN is considered to be essential. Northeast Asia could learn from ASEAN's experience in regional cooperation and other various measures of cooperation.

Activities with ASEAN would include:

- Outreach activities towards ASEAN 2015;
- Joint seminars with ASEAN (Track I, II, and 1.5);
- Joint research projects for soft security cooperation; and
- Invitation to high-level NAPCI meetings.

**Table 1: Causes of and Possible Solutions to Conflicts in Northeast Asia**

No.	Causes	Suggestions
1	No security community in the region	NAPCI should complement existing mechanisms, such as the ARF, EAS and ASEAN+3, and cooperate with ASEAN  NAPCI could emulate the ASEAN Community components (AEC, APSC, ASCC) to build security cooperation in Northeast Asia
2	No common vision	NAPCI should come out with a common vision
3	No common identity	NAPCI should set up the idea of a common identity, a so-called East Asian identity
4	No common institution/regional mechanism	NAPCI should play a role in setting up a common institution in Northeast Asia
5	No integration	Current regional mechanisms, such as the ARF, EAS, and so on, would be complementary to NAPCI to deal with and manage conflicts in the region
6	Nationalism	NAPCI should play a role to decrease the ties of nationalism in the region
7	History	NAPCI can help Northeast Asia deal with their bitter historical experiences as well as move forward by emulating the EU in developing their regional cooperation mechanism
8	Power competition, including the rise of China and the US	NAPCI can play a role in managing the power competition in the region

NAPCI is significant because it complements the existing all inclusive order that ASEAN has been able to cover with a large number of participants, such as the ARF. At times, the number of countries is too large to cater for the specific needs of East Asia. As NAPCI is driven by the Northeast Asian countries, it will be able to cater for the specific needs of the Northeast Asian region. Existing cooperation initiatives among the Northeast Asian nations, such as the trilateral cooperation, are also incorporated in NAPCI.

Although Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia share some similarities and differences in the development of cooperation initiatives, Northeast Asia could learn from the experience of Southeast Asia as well as from the ASEAN Way of consensus and institution building. ASEAN started with economic issues before embarking on hard core security issues. Perhaps NAPCI could adopt a similar route.



Mr Emirza Adi  
Syailendra

However, there are several differences which would cause NAPCI to work differently. The historical situation in Northeast Asia may be a dividing factor within the region. Northeast Asia consists of a group of developed countries, which have their own political, economic and military capabilities. This is different from the case of Southeast Asia where reliance on each member country was needed to progress.

What then is the pattern of commonality for Northeast Asia? For Southeast Asia, the region had the common objective to establish the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) and, later on, to sign the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). The mindset of Northeast Asian leaders needs to change when dealing with hard issues, such as deep political ideologies. Cooperation based on soft issues, such as people-to-people issues, is conceivably easier to begin with. Another challenging factor is the matter of leadership. Since China, South Korea and Japan are all prominent countries in the region, who will take the lead? ASEAN has provided a very good example in its approach to leadership — leadership based on consent.

The role of ASEAN is undoubtedly critical. It is important for South Korea to recognise that ASEAN is important not only to ASEAN itself but to China, Japan and even the United States and Europe. Many lessons can be learned from ASEAN's constructive engagement. More thought should be given to the principles that have worked for ASEAN.

### **Dresden Declaration and Initiative for Unification**

President Park had announced her commitment to pursue an 'East Asia Peace and Cooperation Plan' that will expand trust-building, cooperative security, socio-economic cooperation and human security with all neighbouring countries for a long lasting peace and development in the Northeast Asian region. It was a proposal for humanity, co-prosperity and integration of the separated Korean Peninsula. South Korea will help in the building of infrastructure for North Korea in return for the right to develop underground resources and establish more bilateral exchanges in various sectors. These were some of the objectives given by President Park in her Dresden Declaration.

However, North Korea was reluctant to participate in many inter-Korean dialogues. As a result, it had slowed the process of positive unification initiatives planned and introduced by the South. Although both North and South Korea agreed on denuclearisation in 1991, with the full support of the United States withdrawing all their nuclear weapons placed in South Korea right after the agreement, North Korea's flaky commitment has become one of the major problems affecting the Six-Party Talks. In 2006, North Korea tested its nuclear weapon for the first time and claimed its country as a nuclear state.

With the Six-Party Talks and other regional dialogues created for the purpose of unification, South Korea's commitment has always been 100 per cent towards this purpose. This is also evident from South Korea's effort to create concessions with Russia to accommodate the North in the long run. However, North Korea is still firm in its stand to isolate itself from any commitment towards the unification and peace process. President Park Geun-Hye, through the trustpolitik initiatives and mechanisms,

is not agreeable to North Korea's nuclear possession. President Park would not accept the view that South Korea has to agree to the concept of 'Peace System First, Denuclearisation After' as promoted by the pro-North Korea group because this approach brings more uncertainties among the two Koreas post-unification.

Although South Korea has always trusted the United States and its allies to act as a hub to bring in diplomacy and cooperation between the two Koreas, ASEAN's role as one of the best peace and cooperation hubs cannot be discounted. Over the years, many ASEAN members have established a good relationship with North Korea. The neutralisation of relationship between these states with North Korea has initiated cooperation both in the security and economic sectors. Much of this interdependence has brought in benefits and provided a reason for North Korea not to indulge in conflicts with these countries but to ensure that peace is guaranteed. Nonetheless, South Korea is still very dependent on the United States, which has proved its seriousness and commitment, especially in denuclearisation efforts.

It would seem that the Cold War has not ended in this part of the world as the Korean Peninsula is still divided. North Korea feels that the Six-Party Talks should discuss the peace system first before entering discussions of denuclearisation. However, South Korea has a different approach to peace talks, which includes the denuclearisation of North Korea. Yet, North Korea seems unwilling to denuclearise as the nuclear option is considered important for its survival. There is thus a big divide between the two in their approach to peace initiatives. If this policy difference cannot be reconciled, does this mean that peace is not in sight? How, then, can we move forward?

Truth be told, there is a divided society in the South — a division of the young versus the old — and a divided position with respect to reunification. The young are more concerned with the cost of reunification. Perhaps the first step is to heal the division within the age group. There is a second problem — the South's aspiration to engineer a regime change in the North. It is not incumbent on South Korea to try to engineer such changes. A regime change can only take place if the people in the country desire such a change. Hence, there is a need to 'work on' the people in the North to aspire to a change in their political system.



*From left: Dr Nguyen Thai Yen Huong, Pengiran Datin Shazainah Shrifuddin, Dr Ho-Yeol Yoo, and Dr Carolina G Hernandez*

Although unification initiatives are good, one vital question remains: how would the governments' foreign policy framework work on the ground? A multi-track dialogue is thus needed on all levels between the two countries and other relevant countries or external actors including ASEAN. Public diplomacy is needed to increase the 'buy-in' from the outside. This would encourage North Korea to enter into dialogue.

On a final note, a sense of opposition seems to prevail whenever the two parties are present at face-to-face meetings. Whenever South Korea raises an issue, North Korea will oppose it. The opening up of North Korea will take a long while to occur. The leaders of North Korea should be given the time and space to integrate with South Korea and not be pushed to comply with specific rules. The lack of trust can hinder progress greatly. At the end of the day, integration is best done by the Koreans themselves.

*The issues highlighted in this month's publication were gleaned from a policy seminar, which was held in JW Marriot Kuala Lumpur on 17 November 2014. Jointly organised by Korea Foundation and ISIS Malaysia, the event involved 10 participants from South Korea, 16 from Malaysia, two from Brunei, Singapore, and Vietnam, and one participant from Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand respectively. ISIS Intern **Mr Abu Bakar Badruddin** and Research Assistant **Ms Nurul Izzati Kamrulbahri** report.*

## KOREA FOUNDATION – ASEAN-ISIS POLICY SEMINAR

**Programme**  
17 November 2014

09:00-09:30	<b>Registration</b>
09:30-10:00	<b>Welcoming Remarks</b> <b>Tan Sri Rastam Mohd Isa</b> Chief Executive Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia  <b>Opening Remarks</b> <b>Dr Hyun-seok Yu</b> President of Korea Foundation; Member, Unification Preparatory Committee Republic of Korea  <b>Congratulatory Remarks</b> <b>HE Mr Byungjae Cho</b> Ambassador Embassy of the Republic of Korea, Malaysia  Photography Session
10:00-10:15	Refreshments
10:15-12:00	<b>Session 1</b> <b>Policy on Korean Peninsula: Trust-building Process and Inter-Korean Relations</b>  Moderator: <b>HE Mr Pou Sothirak</b> Executive Director Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP), Cambodia  Presenter: <b>Dr Sang Hyun Lee</b> Director of Security Studies Program Sejong Institute, Republic of Korea  Discussants: <b>Assoc Prof Dr Bilveer Singh</b> Department of Political Science National University of Singapore  <b>Mr Khin Maung Lynn</b> Joint Secretary Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS)
12:00-14:00	Luncheon



14:00-15:30	<p><b>Session 2</b>  <b>Policy on Northeast Asia Region: Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative</b></p> <p>Moderator:  <b>Dr Siviengphet Phetvorasack</b>  Deputy Director General  Institute of Foreign Affairs, Laos</p> <p>Presenter:  <b>Mr Sang-hwa Lee</b>  Deputy Director-General of Policy Planning  Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea</p> <p>Discussants:  <b>Mr Emirza Adi Syailendra</b>  Research Analyst  Indonesia Programme  Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies  Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore</p> <p><b>Assoc Prof Dr Prapat Thepchatree</b>  Director  Centre for ASEAN, Thailand</p>
15:30-16:00	Refreshments
16:00-17:30	<p><b>Session 3</b>  <b>Policy on Unification: Dresden Declaration and Initiative for Unification</b></p> <p>Moderator:  <b>Pengiran Datin Shazainah Shariffuddin</b>  Representative  Brunei Darussalam Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies (BDIPSS)</p> <p>Presenter:  <b>Dr Ho-Yeol Yoo</b>  Professor  Department of North Korea Studies  Korea University</p> <p>Discussants:  <b>Prof Emeritus Dr Carolina G Hernandez</b>  Founding President and Chief Executive Officer  Institute for Strategic and Development Studies (ISDS), The Philippines</p> <p><b>Assoc Prof Dr Nguyen Thai Yen Huong</b>  Vice President  Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam (DAV)  Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vietnam</p>
18:00-20:00	Dinner









## INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (ISIS) MALAYSIA

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