

ISSUE BRIEF

Northeast Asian Futures

Toward a New Multilateralism

NOVEMBER 2017 ROBERT A. MANNING

The great Asian paradox is that a region steadily becoming more economically integrated is filled with distrust, competing nationalisms, and territorial disputes in the security realm.¹ This is epitomized by Northeast Asia and the North Pacific: the region features the world's three largest economies; three of the largest militaries; three of the five declared nuclear weapons states, and one de facto nuclear state. It is the locus of the greatest near-term threat to regional stability and order—the North Korea nuclear problem—and it is also increasingly the nexus of the global economy. Each North Korean missile launch and nuclear test highlights the risks of a very dangerous nuclear flashpoint.

The North Korean nuclear problem is part of a larger Korea question, the last vestige of the Cold War. It holds the potential to reshape geopolitics in East Asia toward either a more cooperative future or a confrontational one. The risks of nuclear war and proliferation, chaos in North Korea, and how the eventual reunification of the Korean Peninsula occurs are likely to have a transformative impact on US-Chinese relations, US alliances with the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Japan, and the strategic equation in the region and beyond.²

Is there a compelling basis for multilateral cooperation on these security matters in the Korean Peninsula or more broadly in Northeast Asia? If so, on what issues might there be value-added—or damage-limiting—regional cooperation? There may be a need to manage a volatile and dangerous situation on the Korean Peninsula for a protracted period. For example, what expectations do the United States and China have of each other's respective responses to regime instability in North Korea? Within the band of collaboration, what is possible (e.g., deconfliction, policy coordination, and/or collective action) in what circumstances and on what basis?

Weighing against the high stakes and significant overlapping of interests in regard to the Korean Peninsula is a substantive amount

This issue brief is the product of the project on **Mapping Northeast Asian Futures: A Multilateral Dialogue on Northeast Asia**, supported by the Korea Foundation. The goal of this project is to identify areas ripe for new cooperation on key strategic issues affecting the future of Northeast Asia over the coming two decades. This project is part of the Atlantic Council's efforts to establish an Asia-Pacific Center. The core mission of the Council's planned Center is to create an Atlantic-Pacific Community that brings together the United States with its European and Asia-Pacific allies and partners to assess key aspects of the long-range trajectory of the region and to develop a strategic perspective for adapting and revitalizing the rules-based international order.

1 Evan A. Feigenbaum and Robert A. Manning, "A Tale of Two Asias," *Foreign Policy*, October 31, 2012, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/10/31/a-tale-of-two-asias/>.

2 For a detailed assessment of the issues and consequences in the event of a collapse of the regime in North Korea, see Bruce W. Bennett, *Preparing for the Possibility of a North Korean Collapse*, RAND Corporation, 2013, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR300/RR331/RAND_RR331.pdf.

of historical baggage and strategic rivalry, and few connective institutions to bind the states in the region. However, diplomatic efforts to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula over the past two decades—most notably, the experience of the China-hosted Six-Party Talks launched in 2003—demonstrate that in several key areas, their respective interests do overlap. Concerted diplomatic foresight among the major actors in Northeast Asia could reduce risks and lay a foundation for greater economic and political integration.

Cooperation Deficit

The enormity of the stakes involved in how events on the Korean Peninsula could unfold and the view that there is a dearth of official dialogue on possible unanticipated scenarios spurred the Atlantic Council to launch a Track 1.5 dialogue with partners from the ROK, China, and Japan, and informally with Russia.³ These discussions were an effort to build on former ROK President Park Geun-hye's now-aborted modest effort at the Five-Party Talks, the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative.⁴ Those talks focused on what they called “non-traditional soft security issues” to foster habits of cooperation in Northeast Asia.

There was a broad consensus that North Korea was a gathering storm that could produce various types of crises with little warning time. Given the magnitude of problems that respective governments may confront, a consultative, crisis-management mechanism with an anticipatory agenda that does the following must be put into place: share/compare assessments; identify issues where there is common ground; clarify expectations on respective responses of the major actors to deconflict them; and build trust. Beyond near-term issues, a Five-Party framework could eventually evolve into one that addresses longer-term subregional issues (e.g., disaster response, civil nuclear cooperation).

3 The Atlantic Council's partners were the Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation in Japan; the ASAN Institute in the ROK, the PLA National Defense University in China, and, in informal discussions, IMEMO in Russia. Unless otherwise specified by referring to the Atlantic Council dialogues or discussions, this issue brief reflects the views and judgement only of the author, and not necessarily those of other participants in the dialogues.

4 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, *Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative: Moving beyond the Asian Paradox towards Peace and Cooperation in Northeast Asia*, 2013, http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/North_Asia/res/eng.pdf.

The North Korea Predicament

Even putting aside the obvious risk of military conflict erupting on the Korean Peninsula, there is a spectrum of types of crises/instability scenarios that could occur with little advance warning, with an impact on all concerned parties in the region. These include:

- natural disasters (flood, earthquake, drought);
- humanitarian disasters (mass famine);
- a stray missile or radioactive fallout spilling into China, the ROK, or Japan;
- a nuclear accident or atmospheric nuclear test gone awry in North Korea;
- leadership death by assassination;
- an elite coupe led by the Korean Workers Party (KWP) and/or Korean People's Army;
- a failed coup attempt, regime collapse, power vacuum, or instability resulting in competing factions and massive refugee flows; or
- a popular revolt (color revolution).

The five parties will tend to perceive the types of instability or crisis dissimilarly, in regard to how they define their interests, whether their views on issues are congruent with, or in conflict with, those of other actors, and whether they believe the issues lend themselves to collaborative responses.

These are not abstract issues. For example, in a regime collapse scenario, what is the desired way and means to respond to a “loose nukes” situation? Would China and the US-ROK alliance react independently? Could the United States, ROK, China, and Russia cooperate to gain control of nuclear weapons? Confronted with instability, large-scale refugee flows, and/or the need to evacuate their citizens from the ROK, should a response be coordinated or collaborative? Should actors on such issues seek a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) mandate (UN Charter, Chapter 7, Article 51)?⁵ Past diplomatic efforts suggest there is sound basis for addressing such questions.

5 Chapter 7, Article 51 of the UN Charter authorizes the right to collective self-defense: United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations, Chapter VII, Article 51*, October 24, 1945, <http://legal.un.org/repertory/art51.shtml>. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks, via the US Department of State*, September



President Moon Jae-in welcomes President Trump to South Korea during his twelve-day tour in Asia.
Photo credit: US Army.

Though the many cycles of diplomacy beginning in the early 1990s did not succeed at denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula, the efforts, particularly the Six-Party Talks and the resulting September 2005 Joint Statement, were an important demonstration of functional multilateralism and a valuable learning experience.⁶ The 2005 accord offered a comprehensive solution that included energy and economic assistance to North Korea, normalization of relations with the United States, and turning the armistice into a peace treaty—all sequenced to progress on denuclearization. Each of the five major powers chaired working groups in an important demonstration of shared interests and cooperative diplomacy.

There was an equal division of responsibility, and an acknowledgement of variable geometry—in the case of a peace treaty, for example, it would involve only parties of the armistice: the two Koreas, the

United States, and China. Although after two years of diplomatic wrangling, Pyongyang walked away from the accord in 2007, rejecting requisite intrusive nuclear inspections, much had been accomplished.⁷ It is worth noting that in addition to enhancing economic sanctions, UN Security Council Resolution 2375, adopted in September after Pyongyang's sixth nuclear test, also reaffirms the 2005 Joint Statement and calls for a resumption of the Six-Party Talks.⁸

Toward Consensus

The Atlantic Council dialogues built on these official efforts, and aimed to form a common picture of the current situation, understand different security

19, 2005, <https://www.state.gov/p/eap/regional/c15455.htm>.
6 <https://www.state.gov/p/eap/regional/c15455.htm>.

7 The Atlantic Council discussions revealed strong Chinese support for resuming Six-Party Talks, as a recent Global Times op-ed underscored: Qingcai Liu, "Northeast Asia Needs New Strategy to Ensure Peaceful Development," *Global Times*, October 16, 2017, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1070548.shtml>.
8 United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2375: Non-proliferation/Democratic People's Republic of Korea*, September 11, 2017, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2375>.

perceptions (e.g., Chinese concerns about US-Japanese and US-ROK alliances and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, deployments), and frame a unique range of issues and contingencies that are captured by one or more of three broad scenarios:

- *Scenario 1:* North Korea's provocations and its expanding nuclear and missile capabilities
- *Scenario 2:* Internal humanitarian or political crisis, instability in North Korea
- *Scenario 3:* Diplomatic resolution and Korean reunification

Under the first scenario, roughly an extension of the current situation, there is a broad consensus among all five parties that Pyongyang's quest for more capable missiles—particularly intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and nuclear weapons, both in quantity and quality (e.g., hydrogen weapons)—will continue unabated and will pose an ever-greater threat to regional stability. There is an equally strong official consensus that efforts to halt and roll back North Korea's nuclear weapons program should be intensified. This is manifested in the increasingly stringent UN Security Council resolutions passed in recent months imposing unprecedented economic sanctions in the aftermath of Pyongyang's ICBM test and then its fifth and sixth nuclear tests. These sanctions ban North Korean exports of coal and other minerals as well as textiles, and restrict North Korea's access to oil.

One important test of Five-Party cooperation is enforcement of sanctions. Some critics have expressed skepticism about the efficacy of sanctions. Until very recently, however, sanctions have not really been applied to North Korea. Prior to Pyongyang's fifth nuclear test, only modest, targeted sanctions were in place. Over the past year, unprecedented, comprehensive sanctions designed to disrupt Pyongyang's entire economy have been put in place and ratcheted up after each missile or nuclear test. Their effects and the timeline for realizing them are unknowns. This is uncharted territory for coercive diplomacy vis-à-vis North Korea.

As nearly 90 percent of North Korea's trade is with China, Beijing's cooperation is essential. China has taken unprecedented steps to curb economic ties with North Korea largely in response to recent UNSC resolutions that have banned major exports and key imports, frozen the assets of Pyongyang government

“ . . . Pyongyang's quest for more capable missiles . . . will continue unabated and will pose an ever-greater threat to regional stability.”

entities, and allowed North Korean vessels suspected by the UN of carrying banned items, including arms or sensitive technologies, to be stopped. China has taken additional steps, instructing its banks not to do business with North Korea and ejecting all North Korean business entities from China.⁹ The United States has also imposed additional sanctions designed to remove North Korea's access to the international financial system, as was done in the case of Iran during the period of coercive sanctions prior to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

North Korea has relied on its embassies and diplomatic missions in forty-nine countries and business front groups—not just in China, but in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries and elsewhere—to launder cash and procure components for its missile and nuclear weapons programs. Halting such activities could disrupt Pyongyang's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs. Reflecting a global consensus to isolate Pyongyang, a number of countries have ejected North Korean embassies after its fifth and sixth nuclear tests.¹⁰ A recent incident in which the United States had intelligence of a clandestine North Korean arms shipment to Egypt illuminates the depth of the problem.¹¹ The United States had sought a UN mandate to interdict North Korean ships in the recent

9 For a view of the evolution of UNSC sanctions on North Korea, see Kelsey Davenport, “UN Security Council Resolutions on North Korea,” Arms Control Association, October 2017, <https://www.armscontrol.org/print/5653>.

10 Heekyong Yang and James Pearson, “Factbox: Countries Which Have Expelled North Korean Ambassadors after Nuclear Test,” Reuters, September 19, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles-diplomacy-factbox/factbox-countries-which-have-expelled-north-korean-ambassadors-after-nuclear-test-idUSKCNIBUOED>.

11 Joby Warrick, “A North Korean Ship Was Seized Off Egypt with a Huge Cache of Weapons Destined for a Surprising Buyer,” *Washington Post*, October 1, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/a-north-korean-ship-was-seized-off-egypt-with-a-huge-cache-of-weapons-destined-for-a-surprising-buyer/2017/10/01/d9a4e06e-a46d-11e7-b14f-f41773c-d5a14_story.html.

UNSC Resolution 2375. One Five-Party issue would be to operationalize plans to cooperate in the interdiction of North Korean ships if there is cause to suspect banned items, particularly arms, WMD technology, or other strategic goods.

In the Atlantic Council dialogues, Chinese interlocutors (including military officials, in their personal capacities) expressed a willingness to cooperate in the enforcement of sanctions, despite adamantly expressed Chinese tactical differences over issues such as THAAD deployments in the ROK and increased US-ROK military exercises. A Five-Party mechanism that included information sharing on Pyongyang's activities would be a useful step toward a cooperative response to sanctions violations.

In addition, ongoing Five-Party dialogue on how to persuade Pyongyang to return to denuclearization talks, what conditions are necessary for denuclearization, how to coordinate the enforcement of sanctions, and/or how to respond to an errant missile test or radioactivity from a nuclear test or nuclear accident are illustrative examples of the utility of a Five-Party mechanism.

The second scenario involves low-probability, high-risk, unanticipated events—call them Grey Swans—with grave potential consequences. In the Atlantic Council discussions, no one argued that North Korea is unstable or that there is any evidence that collapse is imminent. Pyongyang's opaqueness precludes much insight into its internal political dynamics. But the fact that Kim Jong-un is reported to have killed or purged several dozen senior officials in the ruling KWP and members of his own family suggests extreme brutality and profound insecurity.¹² One argument for increasing economic sanctions is that removing cash and luxury imports may curb Kim's ability to buy loyalty and support from the Pyongyang elite. There has been a bottom-up growth of mostly US dollar and Chinese renminbi cash-driven informal markets across North Korea that the regime has tolerated—more than 440—that helps explain growth estimates as high as

3-4 percent annually. Choking off access to cash could disrupt this economic activity.¹³

In any case, there are a range of developments for which all five parties could be better prepared. As a widely discussed recent essay by a prominent Chinese intellectual argued: "The US and South Korea have long tried to persuade China to hold talks on contingency planning. So far Beijing has resisted for fear of upsetting and alienating Pyongyang. But given recent developments, Beijing may have no better choice."¹⁴

The issues suggested in his essay for US-Chinese contingency planning all fall within the three scenarios discussed in this issue brief: emergency refugee problems, loose nuclear weapons, and "post-crisis" political arrangements and reunification. That Beijing, whose tight control of information has created a political climate of intimidation in academia and think tanks, permitted the article to be published reflects, at a minimum, that these issues are being debated by the Chinese leadership. The Atlantic Council discussions—and other think tank dialogues—have detected an evolving willingness on the part of Chinese interlocutors to explore such issues.

One possibility—mass famine or radiation fallout that produces pollution and large-scale refugee flows, but does not threaten the regime—would require rapid responses: Would each neighboring state address the refugee problem independently? Should the UN be invited to manage it? Similarly, natural disasters such as earthquakes or tsunamis, or man-made nuclear ones like Fukushima, also suggest sufficient shared interests that lend themselves to cooperative action. Whatever response is preferred, a Five-Party dialogue where each government conveys its likely course of action and its expectations and/or "red lines" in regard to how others might react, and perhaps, explores cooperative responses, would be worth the price of admission for Five-Party talks.

In the event of political instability, the proportions of a humanitarian crisis would not only grow, perhaps exponentially, but be overshadowed by still larger

12 Andrew J. Nathan, "Who Is Kim Jong-un?" *New York Review of Books*, August 18, 2016, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/08/18/who-is-kim-jong-un/>; K.J. Kwon and Ben Westcott, "Kim Jong Un Has Executed over 300 People since Coming to Power," *CNN World*, December 29, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/12/29/asia/kim-jong-un-executions/>.

13 Sang-Hun Choe, "As Economy Grows, North Korea's Grip on Society Is Tested," *New York Times*, April 30, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/30/world/asia/north-korea-economy-marketplace.html>.

14 Qingguo Jia, "Time to Prepare for the Worst in North Korea," *East Asia Forum*, September 11, 2017, <http://www.easiaforum.org/2017/09/11/time-to-prepare-for-the-worst-in-north-korea/>.



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping are key to diplomacy on the Korean Peninsula. Both Russia and China supported tough UN economic sanctions against North Korea. *Photo credit: Kremlin.*

dilemmas, most notably, control of nuclear and chemical weapons. Whether China and the United States plan to seek to gain control of WMDs, at a minimum, deconflicting plans would be an important topic for Five-Party discussion. Ideally, there is a good case for a cooperative US-ROK-China-Russia denuclearization effort. The collapse of the Soviet Union left Russia with a wealth of experience in eliminating nuclear weapons. And under what auspices would any of the parties respond to either massive refugee flows or loose nukes? What role might there be for the ROK, or for a UN mandate or UN agencies managing the process? One can see potential tragedy looming, and yet there has been virtually no serious discussion among the frontline states and little shared preparatory response planning. Based on the Atlantic Council dialogues, there seems little question that all parties would be well advised to convene discussions with allies and Five-Party partners if only to clarify expectations. In addition, given North Korea's cyber hacking capabilities, cooperation among the five on

cybersecurity may also be a useful component of Northeast Asia dialogue.

The third scenario involves long-term outcomes, the future shape of not only the Korean Peninsula, but Asian regional security. In the event of a crisis scenario leading to Korean reunification, what can China and Russia expect as an outcome? Would the US-ROK alliance continue? Would US troops be on the Yalu River where China borders Korea? Would the North Korean military be demobilized, weapons systems dismantled, and nuclear weapons removed from the Korean Peninsula? Would missile defense systems designed to counter North Korea, like THAAD in the ROK, be dismantled?

Chinese concerns on such issues were on display during the Atlantic Council dialogues, especially on US-ROK missile defenses. Based on these expressed Chinese concerns, it appears that the growing proximity of US and Chinese air and maritime operations, particularly in the East and South China Seas, and apprehension about longer-term strategic stability provide fertile

ground for discussions on confidence-building measures. Yet the United States, ROK, and China have never had substantive discussions on Korean reunification contingencies.

Former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger has suggested that the United States and China negotiate a set of principles that would provide assurances and guidelines on core security matters discussed above in the event of Korean reunification.¹⁵ These principles or guidelines would also need to include not just the end-state, but also the *process* of reunification—e.g., how to respond to loose nukes, internal instability in North Korea, and refugee flows, as well as the role of the UN. While such issues would first need to be hashed out between the United States and the ROK, such talks with China, perhaps as a subset of Five-Party dialogue, could provide Beijing a comfort level that might incentivize greater cooperation.

Over the longer term, it also should be noted that a reunified Korea would open opportunities for economic public-private cooperation and development, deepening integration in Northeast Asia. The possibilities of creating a regional electric grid, oil and gas pipelines, and road and rail transport networks are all very real—once the risk factor of North Korea is removed.¹⁶ While such economic activities would require private-sector participation and public-private partnerships, a Five-Party mechanism could help catalyze economic activities in a post-reunification Northeast Asia.

Northeast Asia beyond Korea

Economic cooperation is just one of many Northeast Asian issues that go beyond managing the Korea question. There are a range of issues the Atlantic

Council discussions identified, such as environmental ones (e.g., brown smog and yellow fog pollution) and humanitarian or natural disaster response, where interests may overlap. But some are addressed in other global and regional fora and bilaterally. As discussed above, issues such as coordinating natural or manmade disaster response planning also lend themselves to be addressed in a Northeast Asia Five-Party framework. A nuclear accident in North Korea could affect neighboring states in various ways, for example, by spewing radiation, affecting water supplies, or requiring evacuations.

More broadly, civil nuclear cooperation is an important, compelling issue where there are common interests and common problems that could at some point be usefully addressed in a Northeast Asian institutional framework. All the nations in Northeast Asia rely to varying degrees on nuclear power for electricity. Japanese and Korean nuclear fuel and equipment provided by the United States are governed by bilateral nuclear cooperation agreements. There are difficult common problems, such as long-term storage of spent fuel, that each nation has yet to fully address.

Nuclear power is an issue where energy security, national security, and environmental protection intersect. There is a rich agenda of shared concerns, from protecting nuclear plants from cyber or terrorist attacks, monitoring radiation, and preparing accident response plans, to managing long-term storage of spent nuclear fuel, a problem that has yet to be fully addressed. An illustrative, but not exhaustive, list of possible areas of civil nuclear cooperation includes:

- preventing crises through threat and risk assessments on nuclear plants from cyber and terrorist attacks;
- monitoring radiation levels and a regional alarm, support, and accident response system;
- maintaining nuclear safety by sharing best practices and training among nuclear operators;
- assisting all parties in meeting the requirements of the convention on the physical protection of nuclear materials;
- developing a regional uranium repository to stockpile nuclear fuel;

15 Henry A. Kissinger, "How to Resolve the North Korea Crisis," *Wall Street Journal*, August 11, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-to-resolve-the-north-korea-crisis-1502489292>.

16 See, for example, "Research on Power Grid Interconnections in Northeast Asia," State Grid Energy Research Institute of State Grid Corporation of China, December 2016, http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Session%201.3.%20Liu%20Lin_China.pdf; Victor Kalashnikov, "The Russian Far East and Northeast Asia: Aspects of Energy Demand and Supply Cooperation," in Takashi Murakami and Shinichiro Tabata, eds., *Russian Regions: Economic Growth and Environment* (Sapporo: Hokkaido University, 2000): 303-324, <http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/sympo/99summer/kalashnikov.pdf>; Peter Hartley, Amy Myers Jaffe, and Kenneth Medlock, "Economic Issues of Natural Gas Trade in Northeast Asia: Political Bridges and Economic Advantages," *Joint US-Korea Academic Studies 16* (2006), <http://www.keia.org/sites/default/files/publications/04Jaffe.pdf>.

- addressing the long-term management of spent nuclear fuel, and exploring the geological, economic, and political feasibility of a regional repository; and
- conducting research and development on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and projects like Gen IV, led by the US Department of Energy.

Europeans have had the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM)—an international institution to manage, regulate, and cooperate on civil nuclear power—since the beginning of the post-WWII nuclear era.¹⁷ Differing cultural, historical, and geopolitical circumstances may make it appear rather ambitious to suggest that Asian countries should actively consider creating an Asia-Pacific version of EURATOM—a PACATOM initiated by the five major actors in Northeast Asia. But such an institution, adapted to Asian circumstances, is worth serious consideration.

Certainly, there is a rich agenda of issues that could lend themselves to collective action and provide mutual benefit. However, all five nations currently have a full plate just trying to prevent the North Korea threat from spinning out of control. For the near term, there may not be the political bandwidth to address broader functional Northeast Asian issues. But based on the Atlantic Council dialogues, the broader regional issues identified in this issue brief, particularly civil nuclear cooperation, are areas that a Five-Party mechanism could evolve toward addressing.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Since the Atlantic Council embarked on this project in early 2016, circumstances have changed substantially. While the concept and initiative of Five-Party talks was a signature issue for the previous administration in Seoul, the new Moon government has not pursued the Five-Party concept. This is in part a result of the pace of events, and in part a result of a preoccupation with Korean Peninsula matters. The relentless series of missile and nuclear tests by North Korea in a mad rush to obtain an ICBM capability and a city-busting hydrogen weapon has created a new sense of urgency, demanding the focus and priority of all five parties.

“... [U]nless a military conflict occurs by miscalculation or design, the challenge of managing the North Korea nuclear problem is likely to continue, if not worsen, over the coming decade.”

At the moment, there is no champion providing leadership to persuade or catalyze the five nations to create a Five-Party framework. Nonetheless, based on the Atlantic Council dialogues with partners in the other four nations, past diplomatic patterns, and an objective assessment of the situation on the Korean Peninsula, a reasonable conclusion is that such a diplomatic mechanism could be a useful risk management tool to the mutual benefit of all five parties.

Why? The simple answer is that there continues to be overlapping interests among the five major actors in Northeast Asia and an institutional deficit with regard to means for cooperative diplomatic action in addressing both the imminent threats and potential unanticipated developments outlined above. Apart from broader regional issues discussed herein, unless a military conflict occurs by miscalculation or design, the challenge of managing the North Korea nuclear problem is likely to continue, if not worsen, over the coming decade.

The stakes and potential outcomes of events on the Korean Peninsula are of a magnitude such that avoiding misperception, miscalculation, and actions based on misplaced assumptions is in the interest of not just all concerned parties, but the entire international community. Consider, for example, the utility of conducting Five-Party tabletop exercises to respond to an instability or loose nukes scenario. Moreover, the array of potential strategic surprises on the Korean Peninsula with enormous consequences and the paucity of multilateral preparation suggests that the modest investment in a political mechanism to better manage risk and address foreseeable problems has little downside and could yield significant mutual benefits. Therefore, the following recommendations are offered to all five governments:

¹⁷ The European Atomic Energy Community, *Treaty Establishing the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM)*, March 25, 1957, https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/ardb/evt/1_avrupa_birligi/1_3_antlasmalar/1_3_1_kurucu_antlasmalar/1957_treaty_establishing_euratom.pdf.

- The United States should promote the concept of a Five-Party framework initiative for Northeast Asia and seek consensus at senior working levels or in Five-Party policy planning talks on feasibility and agenda, initially with US allies, the ROK, and Japan.
- Pending concurrence with US allies, as part of ongoing US dialogue with China on the North Korea issue, the administration should seek Beijing's support, framed as building on the Six-Party experience. Chinese support is the critical factor in realizing this initiative. Suggesting the ROK concurrently propose it to China could also be effective.
- Initially, either the ROK or the United States and China jointly (or trilaterally) should arrange a senior working-level Five-Party discussion on the margins of a regional meeting (e.g., the ASEAN Regional Forum, the East Asia Summit, or the G-20).
- For a Five-Party mechanism to have a chance to gain momentum and to succeed, it will require a mandate from the top, the public endorsement of all five heads of government, and one or more governments to champion the idea. This could be done at a regional summit or at the UN.
- As a practical matter, addressing Northeast Asia-related topics separate from North Korea at the Track 1 governmental level, particularly civil nuclear cooperation or disaster response, may be more than the current political traffic will bear. However, given the prospective risks and benefits involved with such issues, all five governments should support Track 1.5 expert-level dialogues to explore the possibilities and recommend future courses of action. For example, institutions such as the US Department of Energy's national laboratories could engage with counterparts in Northeast Asia to determine whether or how cooperation in these areas might be pursued.

Robert A. Manning is resident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security.

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Atlantic Council

1030 15th Street, NW, 12th Floor,
Washington, DC 20005

(202) 463-7226, www.AtlanticCouncil.org