

SUMMARY OF THE 10TH PLENARY SESSION OF
THE NORTHEAST ASIA COOPERATION DIALOGUE

SEOUL, KOREA

NOVEMBER 9-10, 2000

NEACD X: RAPPROCHEMENT ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA AND ITS REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The 10th plenary session of the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD X) met in a mood of optimism on November 9-10, 2000 in Seoul, Korea. Participants from six major Pacific states welcomed recent positive developments on the Korean peninsula in discussions focused on the session's main theme: *Rapprochement on the Korean Peninsula and its Regional Implications*. Participants also candidly discussed a number of other pertinent issues, including the risk of hostile blocs in the region, missile defense, and the effects of domestic politics on regional foreign policies.

NEACD was originally founded to explore ways to fill the multilateral void in Northeast Asia. Governments encouraged the idea of a multilateral track-two forum and sent policy-level officials to help establish it. One of NEACD's values is its unofficial status, allowing participants to represent their own views, not their government's. Since candidates participate as individuals rather than delegations, they are free to make a variety of suggestions and proposals for enhancing peace and security in Northeast Asia without the limitations of official diplomatic interaction. This creates a more relaxed and candid style of discussion that helps enhance trust.

MUTUAL SUPPORT AND HOW TO SUSTAIN IT

The main topic of NEACD X was rapprochement on the Korean peninsula. The recent developments in Korea inspired a positive atmosphere, encouraging participants to believe that it was indeed possible for governments to solve difficult problems and reduce tensions. They could also see the prospect for continued progress in the future.

Participants highly complimented the efforts of North-South Korea to resume dialogue and build ties, as well as the supportive role played by other states in the region. An American participant expressed gratitude for PRC-DPRK relations, saying that the U.S. road to Pyongyang went through Beijing. Likewise, a Korean participant complimented China's welcoming visits from Kim Jong-il, Russia's establishing friendly relations with both Koreas, and Japan's efforts towards Japan-DPRK normalized relations. Despite journalistic reports of one country or another fearing being left behind in the process, NEACD participants were generally relaxed about the pace and sequencing of all the "tracks" in the process, seeing that they were all moving in the same direction.

Participants expressed the need for continued communication and cooperation in order to keep the various "tracks" moving in the same positive direction. The participants noted that the process of rapprochement is just beginning and needs considerable work before the Koreas will be completely stable and peaceful. American, Korean, and Chinese participants all specifically pointed out that rapprochement requires time, continued cooperation from all neighboring states, and constant communication in the region. One participant said that states should welcome and encourage rapprochement, but not get romantic about it.

AVOIDING BLOCS

Another key concern, raised by a Chinese participant, was the danger of Cold War-like blocs forming in the region. This proposition, which stimulated extensive discussion, suggested that the United States, Japan, and South Korea might form a

coalition facing off against a Russia-PRC-DPRK coalition. Participants linked Russian and Chinese objections toward the United States missile defense systems, as well as China's reservations with U.S.-Japan defense guidelines as causes of potential coalitions. The differences within each potential group were noted, as were the universal desire not to return to Cold War blocs. Even with some participants doubting the plausibility of such an occurrence, all agreed that increased communication between all states in the region is necessary to ease security dilemmas, build trust, and avoid the creation of hostile blocs, and identified NEACD as an important mechanism for such communication.

MISSILES AND MISSILE DEFENSE

Although discussed somewhat less than during previous NEACD sessions, missiles and missile defense were topics at NEACD X, particularly regarding the North Korean missile program and U.S. proposals for National Missile Defense (NMD) and Theatre Missile Defense (TMD).

Japanese participants began the missile discussion by suggesting that all states should cooperate addressing missile threats because DPRK missiles can now reach all surrounding states. Russian and Chinese participants argued that the DPRK missile threat had been exaggerated; one participant claimed that states on good terms with North Korea have no missile fears. Another suggested that North Korea only threatens wealthy states, i.e. Japan and the United States, in order to extract concessions for its cooperation.

A Chinese participant turned the discussion from DPRK missiles to U.S. missile defense programs by asking members from Japan why they oppose DPRK missile

programs, but support U.S. missile defense. To this, participants claimed that U.S. missiles create stability through deterrence whereas DPRK missiles break down peace through threats of hostility.

During the discussion a number of participants treated NMD and TMD as the same thing instead of distinctly different technologies designed to meet different kinds of threats, suggesting the need for additional technical briefings at future NEACD meetings.

THE INFLUENCE OF DOMESTIC POLITICS

NEACD sessions provide opportunities for participants to clarify the domestic political influences operating on their country's foreign policies. Two examples from this meeting are the effects of the abduction issue in Japan-DRPK relations and the U.S. presidential elections.

According to Japanese participants, the abduction issue between North Korea and Japan is one of the key obstacles in the normalization of DPRK-Japan relations, and it is Japanese domestic politics that forces this issue to the fore. Due to the accusation that North Koreans abducted Japanese nationals, Japanese citizens worry about their personal protection and sovereignty. More broadly, Japanese citizens are frustrated with international politics and resent that Japan is the "international checkbook" while lacking the clout to pursue its own objectives. Participants explained that Japan cannot ignore the feelings of its citizens, but they also understand that it is difficult for any state, including North Korea, to admit to wrongdoing. Until the stalemate on the abductee issue can be overcome, participants admitted that it would be difficult for Japan to proceed with normalization with North Korea.

Likewise, participants worried about how U.S. domestic politics, namely the presidential election, would affect Northeast Asian relations. Asian participants worried that a Republican victory would disrupt recent improvements in relations and engagement with the states, particularly North Korea, in the region. Participants expressed fear that a Republican administration would accelerate the building of missile defenses regardless of widespread international opposition. American participants, though, emphasized that foreign policy is not a significant partisan issue in the United States and that much continuity in policies toward Asia could be expected.

FUTURE PLANS

Participants proposed two goals for the next session. First, participants discussed methods through which they could re-involve North Korea in NEACD plenary sessions. North Korea was originally a founding member of NEACD in 1993, but has not participated since then. North Korea's new diplomatic activism suggests that it may now be ready to return to this track-two process. NEACD will try to send a delegation consisting of academic participants from all five countries, or at least its organizer, Susan Shirk, to Pyongyang. In addition, all countries will use every available channel to urge North Korea to return to NEACD. The U.S. hosting of the next session in Honolulu may also be conducive to DPRK participation.

Second, participants decided to establish a new study project to make an academic analysis on the possibility of a track-one process in Northeast Asia. Suggestions for the structure, level, and agenda of a track-one process will be passed to governments prior to

the next ASEAN Regional Forum meeting at which the foreign ministers of the United States, China, Japan, Russia, and North and South Korea may meet.