

Options for Increasing Europe's Security Role on the Korean Peninsula

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I. Context and importance

When we think of Europe's security role in East Asia, non-traditional security is what comes to mind. For example, promoting human and environmental security is both feasible and fits comfortably in the European Union's (EU) security strategy. Monitoring cross-border pandemic outbreaks, working on climate change issues, collaborating on cyber-security, and containing weapons proliferation risks in coordination with East Asian partners are certainly important aspects that contribute to maintaining regional and global security. However, a closer look at the geopolitical dynamics of the Korean peninsula allows us to imagine a European contribution that transcends mainstream thinking.

On the one hand, the strategic partnership between the EU and the Republic of Korea (ROK) is a pillar of stability. Europe and the Republic of Korea (ROK) have solid institutional and operational bases for cooperation: 1) a Framework Agreement¹ with political dialogue on vital topics like nonproliferation, counter-terrorism, human rights, climate change, energy security, and development assistance; 2) an FTA that is the EU's first with an Asian country and the first in a new generation of EU trade agreements. Operationally, a bright spot has been the formal and ad hoc collaboration between EUNAVFOR and the ROK Navy in the highly successful counter-piracy effort in the Gulf of Aden area. Beyond EU-ROK relations, strictly speaking, France, Germany, the UK and Poland all have solid economic and political ties to the ROK, while Sweden plays a unique role in monitoring the DMZ as a member of the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission.

On the other hand, Europe, and especially the EU, has been at best a minor player vis-à-vis the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), a country that is a source of instability in East Asia and beyond. Current concerns include the DPRK's human rights abuses and ongoing nuclear weapons programme, while world leaders and analysts fear the security risks represented by a potential disorderly regime collapse and the

Mainstream thinking about the role of the European Union in East Asia usually rests on non-traditional security threats such as human and environmental security. In contrast, and within the context of the continuing instability on the Korean peninsula, this Policy Brief looks at the potential for EU-Republic of Korea cooperation on hard security matters. This Policy Brief surmises that there is much room for cooperation that chimes with the objectives of the European Security Strategy and its Implementation Report. The Policy Brief concludes that the EU and Member States will need to balance desirability and ambition if coherent and effective EU-ROK cooperation is to emerge.

consequent sudden movement to reunite the two Koreas. The security problems entailed are grave both regionally and globally: Nuclear, Biological, Chemical and Radiological (NBCR) weapons proliferation, cross-border organised crime and humanitarian and migration crises, just to name a few.

Because of Europe's heretofore muted interests in Northeast Asian security and marginalization from such crucial dialogues as the Six-Party Talks, Europe is not well positioned to react to such a scenario. Indeed the major players would obviously be the two Koreas, the United States (US) and China. That said, Europe should not be sidelined.

Rather, the EU and select Member States can and should leverage the strength of the current Europe-ROK partnership in order to play a marginal, yet valuable role in contributing to Korean peninsular security, both now and in the case of sudden, chaotic DPRK collapse.

II. Policy overview and recommendations

The following sketches a few scenarios that could potentially elicit cooperation between Europe (especially the EU), the Republic of Korea (ROK) and other allies in the Northeast Asia region. The suggestions are predicated on the development of requisite political will in Europe, both on the EU and Member State level. The more attainable items require less will, the more difficult items more will. The analysis of Europe-ROK security cooperation identifies threats a) that both the EU/member states and the ROK perceive as in their common interest to fight (and in which the ROK and its allies might desire Europe as a partner), and b) that the EU/Member States can distinguish as fitting into their strategic security framework. In this regard, the roots of CFSP/CSDP are instructive: filling the 'security gap' in terms of the provision of both traditional and human security.

Filling the security gap refers in the first instance to CFSP/CSDP objectives focused on global/regional public security provision that goes beyond the state/national security complex, which in the 21st century has difficulties in accounting for sources of insecurity such as predatory states and state failure, cross-border organised crime, terrorism, poverty, environmental and epidemic public health risk, and NBCR proliferation. It must be remembered, however, that human security qua a security gap to be provisioned is complementary—not antagonistic—to European security in the more general, traditional sense. All of this is clear from the 2003 ESS and the 2008 ESS Implementation Report, which explicitly describe fighting identified threats such as terrorism, WMD proliferation, state failure, and organised crime not only as good for those who immediately benefit, but also crucial for EU citizen security as well.

Secondly, filling the security gap through CFSP/CSDP means complementing European Member State capabilities (and arguably those of the US and other hard-security providing allies) and adding value to what other countries can do in their areas. It also refers to action within a multilateral, international mandate, i.e. actions taken in collaboration with partners who seek institutionalised coordination to respond to global/regional security concerns that might go unaddressed in an environment of free-riding.

Areas of Europe-ROK Cooperation

1) Northeast Asia's Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS)—comprised of the ROK, Japan, and China—is a natural, regional multilateral partner for the EU's European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDPC). The TCS holds periodic tripartite

meetings of both health and agriculture ministers to coordinate measures for preventing, monitoring, and responding to infectious disease outbreaks. This approach mirrors that of the ECDPC, whose task of managing trans-boundary pandemics and vector-borne communicable diseases (especially from plants and animals) fits within the ESS Implementation Report remit on the security-development nexus. In a world of ever increasing cross-border, inter-regional flows of people, health security concerns such as pandemic influenza, recurrent endemic polio reservoirs, SARS, antibiotic resistant tuberculosis, and coronavirus-caused Middle East Respiratory Syndrome can best be countered through international best practice and data sharing, coordinated monitoring, and the establishment of early warning systems. The ECDPC and TCS working together closely in these areas would entail high human security benefits with low financial costs and political risk (to the contrary, in fact, such collaboration could lead to spillover into other areas of multilateral cooperation).

2) Dealing with global environmental challenges is another domain of ongoing and future cooperation between Europe and the ROK. Beyond climate change issues addressed via the EU-ROK FTA, there is one innovative area for EU-ROK environmental cooperation that would have immediate practical consequences and potential political spillover—accordingly this area is not low hanging fruit, but rather would require considerable political will both from Europe and the ROK. Namely, the DPRK will enter the carbon credit trading mechanism during the middle of this decade, as a total of thirteen emission certificate granting projects come online, including a major new hydroelectric plant. The ROK will host a carbon market beginning in 2015 (it will be linked to the EU carbon market, one should note). One of the recurrent ideas is that the ROK should buy DPRK carbon credits. This would not only join the ROK and DPRK in a global initiative to control GHG emissions, but, because it would be win-win economically for the two countries, it would allow for trust-building that could serve to resuscitate better overall relations on the peninsula. There has even been high-level talk that the two Koreas could use a percentage of the transaction from the carbon trading scheme to set up an escrowed 'unification fund.'

The problem is that currently—for political/diplomatic, legal, and logistical/technical reasons—it is difficult for the ROK to purchase DPRK credits. The EU—with its already developed carbon market and relatively clean hands on the peninsula—could serve as broker. This idea has in fact already been broached by the Hanns Seidel Stiftung in Seoul, which works closely with European partners in capacity building projects in the DPRK.

3) One situation of concern is various legal aspects that would complicate the transition toward reunification. For example, how would disputed property ownership claims in today's DPRK be handled after the collapse of the regime? Many ROK citizens consider

themselves the rightful owners of property today owned *de jure* by the DPRK (an effect of property seizure or forced abandonment during the Korean War) and *de facto* by the North Koreans who occupy it. Following the collapse of the DPRK, those ROK citizens will make claims on their property. One option is to grant the claims, in which case many North Koreans will be both homeless and disgruntled with re-unification – a recipe for insurgency.

Another option is to give the North Koreans title to disputed property they currently occupy (while compensating South Korean claimants). In this situation it is likely that many North Koreans would sell their property for a quick windfall profit, which will 1) result in rapid inflation erasing the windfall; and, 2) leave those same North Koreans property-less in the long-term. Establishing systems that handle the claims, pay South Korean claimants and find a way to keep North Koreans occupying their property during a vesting period will be a huge challenge for a peninsula whose governance will be strained to breaking point by other collapse and re-unification tasks. Germany has some experience in this area, and its leaders and policy experts (either in government or via Track II dialogue) could assist the ROK both now and in the future to plan for and execute such administrative duties. Perhaps a type of EULEX judicial training mission could also be envisioned for such a scenario.

4) In a disorderly collapse situation, Korean authorities would face other possible legal challenges to whose solutions Europe could conceivably contribute. For instance, the ROK constitution recognises all Koreans – North and South – as Korean citizens, which means that during a transition situation presumed criminals would be entitled to due process. Many would benefit from a blanket amnesty; some would need to be tried. In any event tens of thousands would have to be detained awaiting justice. Not doing so would risk the formation of criminal organisations – traffickers, hacking rings, etc. – who could represent a security risk on the peninsula and beyond. Europe's international law expertise and history of advising governments on transitional justice would be valuable to a Korea undergoing re-unification. A more pointed question is that of who would guard these thousands of detainees awaiting trial or amnesty. At the very least, thousands of North and South Koreans would need to be recruited and trained to act as guards – a task that the ROK and the US would find difficult given the likely hard security concerns present during a disorderly transition. Even more likely is that a re-unified Korea would lack the manpower to carry out this guard activity itself, given the peninsula's aging, declining population. Although reaching the necessary political will seems difficult, this is an area where the EU potentially could contribute to Korean peninsular security.

5) NBCR proliferation is one of the major concerns of a chaotic DPRK break-up, and accordingly there will be a race by concerned polities – the US, the ROK and China – to reach and secure weapons sites. One problem in such circumstances – especially for nuclear weapons – is

that the non-proliferation treaty demands handling of weaponised/ weaponisable nuclear material only by recognised nuclear weapons states, a group to which the ROK does not belong. This would place the entire burden on US forces, who in this situation would already be stretched extremely thin. Most estimates maintain that to secure just the Yongbyon complex the US would need at least two Brigade Combat Teams (each with thousands of troops) specialised in securing such sites, to say nothing of the more than 200 other known DPRK weapons sites. The US, however, only has one team deployed permanently in the ROK, and in a rapid transition situation would have difficulty supplying sufficient BCTs. France and the United Kingdom (UK) both have such teams, and while the US alone would be responsible for reaching the sites initially, it would behoove all concerned to begin planning for contingencies in which the securing of said sites could be passed on to European allies so that US troops could be engaged in other necessary areas.

Once NBCR sites are secured, weapons disposal would remain a critical challenge. The DPRK has a large, diffuse chemical/biological weapons arsenal that would need to be destroyed following the collapse of the DPRK. The problem, again, is manpower. The ROK forces, even with significant US reinforcement, would in the best of circumstances be challenged by the demands of stabilising the peninsula. However, due to demographic decline the ROK military will drop from 22 to 12 active divisions by 2022 (528,000 current troops reduced to 415,000). As a recent RAND report argues, this force is nowhere near enough to stabilise the peninsula, and as a result the US will be called on even more than under current scenarios (Bennett, 2013). In this situation, the critical task of securing and destroying the chemical/biological weapons stockpiles should fall to other international actors. As it happens, several European states have companies that possess field-deployable hydrolysis systems that can neutralise and destroy the weaponised chemicals/agents and their precursors. Airbus and Veolia are just two examples. Both companies even tendered contracts for carrying out this task on Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles. Syria also serves as a precedent insofar as Danish and Norwegian ships helped transport the chemical weapons to their destruction destination in the Mediterranean Sea, while Italy volunteered but did not actually contribute. All this is simply to say that there is precedent for Europe acting in this domain, and following a disorderly collapse of the DPRK the US would be so preoccupied with geostrategic and hard security issues on the peninsula that it would likely welcome this type of European contribution to a crucial nonproliferation objective.

6) The possibility of a European hard security contribution to a post-DPRK collapse seems preposterous. That said, the US Department of Defense currently has 28,500 troops stationed in the ROK and another 50,000 in neighbouring Japan. Even in the current environment this number is too small to appropriately supplement the ROK military in the aftermath of a regime collapse in the DPRK; this situation

will deteriorate as the looming ROK troop cuts take place over the coming decade. Thus there will be an opportunity – a need, in fact – for international peace-makers/peace-keepers, and the EU could be at the top of the list. One might argue that this need is unlikely – that the US will add enough reinforcements – but it is not obvious that the US would want to do so. More to the point, events like regime collapse can happen very quickly, and the US may require more time than available to mobilise its forces. In such a situation, a stopgap EU force could be valuable.

Conclusion

Three additional points serve by way of conclusion. First, each of the areas of actual or potential Europe-ROK cooperation fits the remit of the European Security Strategy and its 2008 Implementation report. Moreover, they are largely complementary to hard security efforts, or, if they involve hard security provision, are complementary to the headline capacities of Europe's allies, especially the ROK and the US.

Second, some of the proposed fields of cooperation are incompatible. The soft security tasks (environmental) can be engaged in under basically any circumstances, but some of the hard security related items may preclude other types of actions because of political conflicts or scarce resources on both the European and ROK sides. For example, acting as a DPRK-ROK broker for carbon trading will likely not be possible if the EU is planning the contingencies of intervention in the DPRK following its possible collapse. Thus the EU and Member States will need to balance desirability and ambition and feasibility of action.

Third, the ongoing events in Ukraine and Iraq demonstrate that the US cannot simply pivot to the Asia-Pacific. It will need to continue to put serious military resources in other strategically vital regions. Moreover the US's weak response to Russian involvement in Ukraine (and, earlier, Georgia) has unnerved US allies in East Asia—especially Japan and the ROK. Both of these points militate for the US's allies—including Europe—to be more involved in filling the (real or perceived) security gap.

Strategic thinking allows for pro-active contingency planning; even better, thinking about the future can allow actors to mould

it indirectly in the present so that contingency plans may not even need to be used at all. There is no guarantee that the above possible courses of action are good ones, but they are worth evaluating and planning in consultation with ROK leadership and the US.

Endnotes

¹This has been filled out with a Crisis Management Agreement signed by President Park Geun Hye and High Representative Catherine Ashton in May 2014.

References

Bennett, B.W. (2013) "Preparing for the Possibility of a North Korean Collapse" (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation). See: http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR331.html (Accessed 9 July 2014).



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