

**Resolving Crises in East Asia through a New System of Collective Security:**

**The Helsinki Process as a Model**

**Testimony by NED President Carl Gershman before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

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I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the Helsinki Commission, for organizing this hearing at a critical moment in US relations with Northeast Asia.

It was almost eight years ago to the day that I and several others active on the issue of human rights in North Korea joined with policy and Korean-affairs specialists to form a working group to consider how a comprehensive framework involving international security, economic cooperation, human rights and humanitarian aid could be developed for the Korean Peninsula and, more broadly, for Northeast Asia.

Our decision to form this group followed the agreement reached in the Six-party Talks to explore ways of promoting a common political, economic and security agenda linking the two Koreas with China, Russia, Japan and the United States. This opened the door to creating a permanent multilateral organization for advancing security and cooperation in Northeast Asia, one of the few regions of the world without such a mechanism.

Ambassador James Goodby of the working group, who had played a key role in developing the “basket three” human- rights provisions that became part of the Helsinki Final Act, drafted the first of several papers that spelled out how negotiations to resolve the North Korea nuclear issue and achieve a final settlement of the Korean War could evolve into a Helsinki-type process for Northeast Asia leading to the eventual creation of a multilateral -- and multidimensional -- organization for collective security.

The effort to encourage such a process had the strong backing of Ban Ki-moon, at the time South Korea’s Foreign Minister and now the U.N. Secretary General, who told a major gathering in Helsinki of Asian and European leaders that “The challenge for Northeast Asia is how to draw upon the European experience to build a mechanism for multilateral security cooperation.”

Building such a mechanism was the focus of one of the five working groups of the Six-party Talks, but efforts to implement the idea were aborted when the talks broke down at the end of 2008. Since then, international relations in Northeast Asia have become much more confrontational. The region suffers from what South Korea’s President Park Geun-hye has called “Asia’s paradox,” which is an acute discrepancy between the region’s dynamic economic growth and interdependence on the one hand, and the rise of nationalism, conflict and distrust on the other. Clashes over disputed maritime space in the East China Sea, North Korea’s nuclear

threat and provocative brinkmanship, intensified military competition, and historically-rooted tensions, even between such ostensible allies as Japan and South Korea, have heightened anxiety over prospects for violent regional conflict.

The situation has just become even more dangerous with China's unilateral establishment of an Air Defense Identification Zone overlapping with Japan's own air-defense zone and encompassing South Korea's Ieodo reef as well. In the words of *The Economist*, "China has set up a *casus belli* with its neighbors and America for generations to come."

Ironically, whereas North Korea's nuclear program was the catalyst for the Six-party Talks and the possible creation of a system of collective security for Northeast Asia, it is now the grave deterioration of the security environment in the region that could act as such a catalyst. The crisis certainly dramatizes the critical need for such a system, though that is a long-term goal while the immediate need is for measures to reduce risk, enhance communication through military hotlines and other instruments that might prevent miscalculations, and to begin to develop military confidence-building measures similar to those negotiated in the CSCE framework.

Nonetheless, it is not too early to begin thinking about a more comprehensive architecture that would provide a forum for regional powers to discuss security. *The Economist* suggested that such a forum, had it existed in Europe in the early part of the last century, might have prevented the outbreak of World War I, and that there are disturbing parallels to the situation in Northeast Asia today, with the Senkakus playing the role of Sarajevo.

For such a forum to be sustainable and effective, a security dialogue would need to be buttressed by a broader program of exchanges and economic cooperation. It has been said that adding a "basket-three" human dimension would not work for Northeast Asia because the region's autocracies are well aware of the liberalizing consequences of the Helsinki process in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. But it is hard to imagine a system of collective security working without more interaction at the societal level, and having a broader context for negotiations would make possible trade-offs that might facilitate reaching an agreement. Northeast Asia may be different from the region encompassed by the Helsinki process, but the "Sakharov doctrine" regarding "the indivisibility of human rights and international security" has universal relevance and should not be abandoned, even if it has to be adapted to the circumstances of the region.

In addition to the incentive provided by the current crisis to explore a new system of collective security for Northeast Asia, I want to note two other factors that can be helpful. The first is the vigorous support given to the idea by President Park when she addressed a joint session of the Congress last May. Her statement has of course now been overshadowed by the momentum toward confrontation, and South Korea's declaration of an expanded air defense zone partially overlapping China's and including Ieodo only adds to this momentum. Still, South

Korea's understandable response to China's over-reaching may help to establish the strategic balance needed to negotiate an end to the current crisis, and President Park's commitment to a system of collective security shows that she may want to use this crisis to make the case for a broader architecture.

Her capacity to provide leadership at this critical time should not be underestimated. She demonstrated both toughness and a readiness to negotiate when, after a period of heightened tension following North Korea's nuclear test explosion last April, South Korea reached an agreement with the North to re-open the Kaesong Industrial Zone. This experiment in economic cooperation shows the potential of President Park's "trustpolitik," though North Korea's cancellation of family reunions that were part of the Kaesong agreement also shows how difficult it will be to sustain any kind of engagement with Pyongyang. Still, her steadiness of purpose is encouraging, as is her desire, as she told the Congress last May, to extend the "Trust-building Process" she has started "beyond the Korean Peninsula to all of Northeast Asia where we must build a mechanism of peace and security." That goal would be significantly advanced if she would also apply her "trustpolitik" to Japan.

The other helpful factor is the potential role of Mongolia. In a recent paper contrasting the challenge of building a collective security system in Europe and Asia, the Japanese diplomat Takako Ueta wrote that Northeast Asia lacks "a neutral country with diplomatic skills and efficient conference support...comparable to...Austria, Finland, Sweden or Switzerland." But that is not true because Mongolia is such a country.

Last April, when Mongolia chaired the Seventh Ministerial Conference of the Community of Democracies, its President Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj announced the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on Northeast Asian Security, an initiative to provide "a dialogue mechanism on security in Northeast Asia" that will give "equal consideration of the interests of all states" and set "a long-term goal of building peace and stability in the region."

Mongolia has an unusual geopolitical situation. Sandwiched between China and Russia, it has maintained what President Elbegdorj called "neighborly good relations" with these two big powers as well as with the other nations in the region, which he calls "our third neighbor." It even maintains good relations with North Korea, which were not spoiled when he concluded a State Visit to the DPRK on October 30 with a speech at Kim Il Sung University in which he said "No tyranny lasts forever. It is the desire of the people to live free that is the eternal power." He also told his North Korean audience that twenty years earlier Mongolia had declared herself "a nuclear-free zone," and that it "prefers ensuring her security by political, diplomatic and economic means."

Mongolia's international position is rising. In addition to chairing the Community of Democracies, it has joined the OSCE and may soon become a member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation organization (APEC). Last September, at the opening of the U.N.

General Assembly in New York, President Elbegdorj was the only head of state invited to join President Obama in presiding over a forum of the Administration's Civil Society Initiative that seeks to defend civil society around the world against growing government restrictions.

Henry Kissinger, writing about Austria's Chancellor Bruno Kreisky, observed that "One of the asymmetries of history is the lack of correspondence between the abilities of some leaders and the power of their countries." President Elbegdorj is such an outsized leader of a small country, and the fact that he is now positioning Ulaanbaatar to play the kind of role in Northeast Asia that Helsinki once played in Europe could be an important factor leading to a system of collective security in Northeast Asia.

This region certainly has its own distinctive characteristics, and Helsinki does not offer a readily transferable "cookie-cutter" model for East Asia or any other region. But as Ambassador Goodby said in one of the papers he wrote for our working group, "so long as nation-states are the basic building blocks of the international system, the behavior of these units within that system is not like to be radically dissimilar. History suggests that autonomous behavior by powerful nations – behavior that ignores the interests of others – sooner or later leads to disaster. The corollary of this lesson is that some mechanism has to be found, be it implicit or explicit, to allow for policy accommodations and for self-imposed restraint within a system of nations. To fail to do so is to make a collision almost inevitable."

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.