



HELSINKI COMMISSION REPORT

May 5, 2017

IN BRIEF

The OSCE as a Model: Asian Insights

From April 14 to 22, 2017, Helsinki Commission Chief of Staff Ambassador David Killion and Policy Advisor Paul Massaro traveled to Tokyo, Japan and Seoul, South Korea for consultations with these OSCE Asian Partners for Cooperation. Major topics of discussion included the call for a Helsinki Final Act-inspired arrangement for northeast Asia and the heightened tensions on the Korean Peninsula. The future of the OSCE Asian Partners dialogue and further cooperation with the OSCE and other European institutions were also discussed.

The OSCE Asian Partners for Cooperation is a grouping of countries in Asia with which the OSCE engages in a permanent, active dialogue, recognizing the linkages between European and Asian security. Currently, the OSCE Asian Partners include Japan, which joined in 1992; the Republic of Korea; which joined in 1994; Thailand, which joined in 2000; Afghanistan, which joined in 2003; and Australia, which joined in 2009. Mongolia was previously an Asian partner, having joined the grouping in 2004, but became a full OSCE participating State in 2012.

The trip offered Helsinki Commission staff the opportunity to get a firsthand account of the situation in northeast Asia at a critical time, and

ahead of the annual OSCE Asian Partners Conference taking place in Berlin later this year.

A Helsinki Final Act-Inspired Model for Northeast Asia

In every meeting, participants discussed how OSCE lessons could be applied to the region. While the Helsinki Final Act is a product of a particular time and place, it has provided a unique set of insights over the decades of its

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existence that could prove invaluable to the security situation in northeast Asia. Helsinki Commission Ranking Senator Ben Cardin has been a proponent of the development of such a regional security organization in the region.

Former South Korean President Park Geun-hye's proposed North Asian Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI) provides a strong precedent on which to build such an organization, drawing its original inspiration from the OSCE, albeit omitting a hard security portion. Interlocutors in the South Korean government have expressed their belief that any new administration in the Republic of Korea will likely have an interest in pursuing a similar initiative, this time to include hard security issues.

Japanese government and academic interlocutors also noted the OSCE's experience and expressed their support for the development of a similar security process. In particular, Takako Ueta of National Christian University imagined the formation of a body similar to the OSCE's Permanent Council. It may be especially appropriate at this juncture for the Japanese to take a leading role in the formation of any such organization, given the positive relationship between the Abe government and the Trump Administration. The city of Tokyo could also be an ideal meeting spot for any such council given its central location and the established presence of permanent representation from regional powers.



From left: Helsinki Commission Policy Advisor Paul Massaro and Chief of Staff Ambassador David Killion with Japanese parliamentarian Mitsunari Okamoto and Emily Hicks, foreign service officer at the U.S. Embassy in Japan.

The Threat of North Korea

Given the proximity and relevance of the North Korean threat to any regional security model, the dynamics of the geopolitical situation were also discussed in every meeting. Both Asian Partners seemed to prefer the approach of the Trump Administration toward the region to that of the Obama Administration, with Japan in particular providing a glowing review of President Trump's personal interactions with President Xi Jinping of China and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan.

Japanese interlocutors appeared more eager than their South Korean counterparts to resolve the North Korean threat, feeling that Japan would be one of the first targets should North Korea's threats ever be carried out. South Korean interlocutors tended to be more cautious on this point, claiming that Kim Jung Un is a rational actor who will react to incentives and disincentives, rather than the madman that is often portrayed in the media.

One of the most important takeaways was an indication from both Asian Partners that a nuclearized North Korea may be unavoidable.

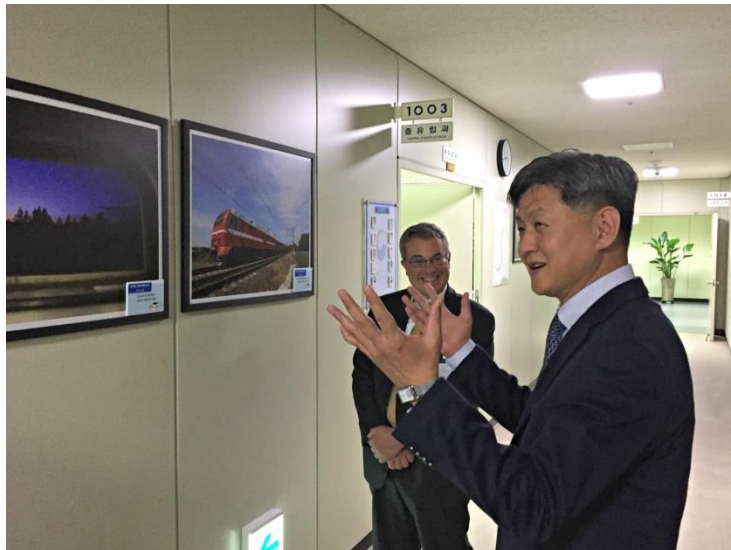
Should the North Korean regime implode, a Japanese and U.S.-assisted South Korean takeover of the peninsula could be perceived as a threat by China, while a Chinese takeover of North Korean territory would certainly be found to be unacceptable by South Korea, Japan, and the United States. It would also set a dangerous precedent of land seizure in a region with many disputed borders. A preemptive military strike would likely end even more badly, with millions of South Koreans and thousands of U.S. service members killed by North Korean artillery strikes on Seoul. Yet the consequences of lack of engagement are obvious.

Because of this hurting stalemate, the creation of a North Asian organization resembling the OSCE may be more appropriate than ever. The only issue would be whether North Korea could be brought to the table prior to its development of nuclear weapons, or if it would refuse to engage until it has attained them. Although the latter seems more likely, the development of a regional security organization could still help develop norms to which North Korea could later be held, and offer a forum to discuss the other

outstanding issues in the region from the South China Sea to the Senkaku Islands.

The Future of the OSCE Asian Partners for Cooperation

Although an OSCE Asian Partner has become a participating State in the past, the grouping remains somewhat underdeveloped, which is unfortunate given its potential as a forum for East-West exchange. There are many areas in which the experience of the OSCE could inspire policymakers in the East.



Helsinki Commission Chief of Staff Ambassador David Killion (left) with Director General of the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs European Bureau, Lim Soo-suk.

For example, Director General of the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs European Bureau, Lim Soo-suk, detailed a project, carried out in cooperation with the German government, in which the two countries coordinated a trans-Siberian train ride from Vladivostok to Berlin for South Korean politicians and North Korean defectors to call for Korean reunification. Following the three-week train ride, participants took part in a march for Korean

reunification in Berlin, alluding to and drawing lessons from the successful post-communist reunification of Germany.

Another area of potential cooperation between OSCE participating States and the OSCE Asian Partners is in what the Germans call *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (the process of coming to terms with the past). Despite the many common interests in the northeast Asian region, a lack of truth-telling and accounting for past atrocities constantly stands in the way of cooperation between the countries of northeast Asia. These problems continuously hinder the development of more advanced cooperation and truly positive relationships in the region.

The sharing of best practices and advantages of facing and discussing history could be brought forward in Asian Partners Contact Group meetings or at the annual OSCE Asian Partners Conference as methods to develop greater trust within the block. This could facilitate the creation of a forum such as that described above as well as enhance the OSCE participating States-OSCE Asian Partners relationship. An eventual regional security forum in northeast Asia could also consider

having meetings or even a permanent body where such items are discussed.

The annual OSCE Asian Partners Conference, meeting this year in Berlin on June 19-20, will provide a forum to build on these ideas and offer a lively exchange of experiences and a continued discussion of a northeast Asian security process.

About the Helsinki Commission

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission, is an independent agency of the Federal Government charged with monitoring compliance with the Helsinki Accords and advancing comprehensive security through promotion of human rights, democracy, and economic, environmental and military cooperation in 57 countries. The Commission consists of nine members from the U.S. Senate, nine from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense, and Commerce.

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