

Toward a Stable Order on the Korean Peninsula and the Management of Sino-Russian and Sino-Japanese Competition in Northeast Asia

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ABSTRACT

The stability of Northeast Asia, particularly the Korean Peninsula, is crucial for global security and economic growth. The region remains highly contentious due to the competing interests of the United States, China, Russia, Japan, and South Korea, with North Korea's nuclear capabilities posing a significant threat to peace. Addressing these challenges is vital as the increasing tensions and shifting great power dynamics could lead to destabilization and conflict. Economic interdependence among Japan, South Korea, and China is substantial, yet historical grievances often inhibit security collaboration. The power dynamics in the region have evolved from a post-World War II bipolarity into a complex interplay marked by the influences of China and Russia, affecting responses to North Korea. Moreover, efforts to resolve the North Korean crisis through comprehensive agreements have stalled; instead, a focus on manageable, incremental engagements is necessary for fostering trust and stability. Failure to address these emerging challenges risks further entrenching historical animosities and fostering instability, which in turn could jeopardize economic relationships and security alliances. The absence of effective diplomacy may lead to increased militarization, potential conflict escalation, and disrupted trade flows, with significant consequences for regional and global security frameworks. To foster stability in the region, it is recommended to establish a Northeast Asia Stabilization Forum to facilitate ongoing dialogue and manage security issues collaboratively. Strengthening economic integration initiatives through mutual benefit-focused joint ventures among Japan, South Korea, and China is also vital. Additionally, coordinating humanitarian and development projects can enhance goodwill and compliance with broader security measures. A shift towards incremental diplomatic strategies that prioritize phased confidence-building measures with North Korea is essential. Engaging external actors such as the U.S. and the European Union will support regional stability through shared economic and security initiatives. In conclusion, creating a stable regional order in Northeast Asia is imperative not just for immediate crisis management but also for securing long-term peace and prosperity. By implementing these recommendations, regional actors can work towards a cooperative future that prioritizes security and economic growth, positioning Northeast Asia as a fundamental pillar of a peaceful global order.

Keywords: Northeast Asia, Korean Peninsula, Nuclear Stability, Sino-Russian Competition, Economic Interdependence, Diplomatic Strategies, Multilateral Cooperation, Security Cooperation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Korean Peninsula remains one of the most dangerous fault lines in global security. It is the site where the interests of the United States, China, Russia, Japan, and the Republic of Korea intersect most sharply, and where the actions of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continue to shape the pace of crisis and the possibility of peace. Efforts at regional security management, most famously the Six Party Talks, have stalled. Meanwhile, great power dynamics are shifting. Russia, weakened in some areas by war and sanctions, is turning eastward for diplomatic and economic partners. China continues to consolidate its regional influence while hedging against instability. These two powers have moved closer

together on the global stage, yet they are not always aligned in their approaches to the peninsula. Understanding their patterns of competition and cooperation is central to imagining a new pathway beyond the paralysis of previous frameworks.

In the following we disregard Japan's interests in a stable regional order or detente in North-East Asia, since there is no existential threat to Japanese territory from a Chinese land invasion, so long North Korea is nuclear armed and doesn't launch missiles into its territorial waters. Japan's interests in North East Asia center on securing sea lanes, maintaining regional stability, balancing China's rise, and promoting economic integration through rules-based trade. These interests are informed by principles of a "free

and open Indo-Pacific,” multilateral cooperation, and respect for international law, particularly freedom of navigation and peaceful dispute settlement. Tokyo might even benefit from a softening of enmities in North-East Asia to the extent the dispute over the Kuriles is linked to both Russian energy exports and sino-russian dialogue over NE Asia, something that the increased trade in energy, arms and merchandise between eastern Siberia and China enable or at least doesn't exclude.

Beijing conceptualises security across a seamless arc linking Southeast Asia, Taiwan, and Northeast Asia—seeing them not as discrete theatres but as interlocking fronts where maritime, economic, and strategic dynamics converge. This integrated lens enables it to anticipate cascading risks and leverage cross-regional dependencies—and so should we all during the current upheaval in Beijing. Adapting to the realities of China's perceived sense of security would go a long way to stabilize North-East Asian and the wider Indo-Pacific area. Sequencing is clear enough. It is the maritime order in the Southern Chinese Sea that is the more urgent to address for decision-makers to keep at bay the wolf warriors in Beijing. This should allow us to think thoughts about how to address the situation on the Korean peninsula, and by implication, the regional order in North East Asia not to mention the institutionalised order underpinning and complementing diplomatic dialogue and exchange. So much more, Japan's preferences are pro-Western, yet historically Tokyo has tended to tilt in the direction of the stronger partner.

Research Problem

The primary research problem addressed in the piece centers around the instability and ongoing tensions in Northeast Asia, particularly on the Korean Peninsula. This instability is significantly influenced by North Korea's nuclear capabilities and the competing strategic interests of the United States, China, Russia, Japan, and South Korea. The challenge lies in reconciling these competing interests and addressing historical grievances that impede diplomatic progress, thereby threatening regional and global security.

The study aims to analyze the dynamics of Northeast Asia by exploring the historical and contemporary relationships among the countries in the region to understand the underlying causes of instability. It seeks to propose diplomatic initiatives that develop actionable and incremental steps leading to stabilization in the region, with a focus on risk reduction and cooperative engagements among the major stakeholders. Another objective is to enhance economic interdependence by investigating how stronger economic ties among Japan, South Korea, and China can mitigate security concerns and foster a culture of cooperation. Additionally, the study aims to establish a framework for crisis management by recommending the creation of a regional body dedicated to

monitoring compliance with agreements, facilitating dialogues, and managing security issues without the pressure of reaching comprehensive deals.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to regional stability and global security. By addressing the complex interplay of historical grievances, economic interdependence, and political dynamics in Northeast Asia, the study provides a pathway for effective diplomacy by offering a pragmatic approach that prioritizes manageable engagements over immediate, sweeping agreements, which have proved difficult to achieve. Furthermore, it offers insights into cooperative frameworks that aim to build trust and cooperation, creating a conducive environment for longer-term solutions to security issues. The conclusions and recommendations presented can guide policymakers in the United States, Northeast Asia, and beyond in forming strategies that promote peace, security, and economic prosperity in a historically volatile region.

Literature review

Christopher M. Dent (2008), *China, Japan and Regional Leadership in East Asia*

Dent's constructivist orientation challenges materialist readings of regional leadership by foregrounding identity formation and normative projection. He posits that China and Japan are not merely strategic actors but narrative architects, each cultivating a regional persona through diplomatic signaling, institutional engagement, and symbolic capital. This reframing aligns with post-structuralist IR scholarship that treats leadership as a discursive practice rather than a fixed attribute. Dent's analysis is particularly relevant for understanding how regional orders are socially constructed and contested. However, the work's reliance on elite discourse risks overlooking the role of transnational civil society, urban diplomacy, and subregional coalitions in shaping leadership legitimacy.

David C. Kang (2010), *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute*

Kang's intervention is both historiographical and theoretical. By reconstructing the tributary system, he destabilizes the Westphalian assumption of anarchy and introduces a model of hierarchical stability rooted in Confucian norms and ritualized diplomacy. His work resonates with historical institutionalism and norm diffusion theory, offering a counterpoint to realist and liberal paradigms. Importantly, Kang's analysis invites reconsideration of sovereignty, legitimacy, and order in non-Western contexts—an insight that could be

strategically leveraged in Red Sea governance, where hybrid systems of authority persist. Critics rightly note that the tributary model may obscure coercive dynamics and underplay the agency of peripheral actors, but its conceptual utility remains profound.

Kent Calder & Min Ye (2010), *The Making of Northeast Asia* Calder and Ye's political economy approach situates Northeast Asia as a region in flux—marked by deepening economic interdependence, emergent institutional architectures, and strategic recalibration. Their analysis draws on regime theory and complex interdependence, suggesting that functional cooperation can outpace historical antagonism. This thesis is particularly salient for urban-regional planning, where infrastructural integration and policy harmonization mirror the dynamics Calder and Ye describe. However, their optimism about regional cohesion may underestimate the resilience of nationalist narratives and the fragility of trust-building mechanisms. The work is best deployed as a diagnostic tool for identifying latent potential in regional governance, rather than as a predictive model.

Akihiro Iwashita (2016), *The China-Japan Border Dispute: Policies and Perspectives*

Iwashita's case study of the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute exemplifies micro-level conflict analysis, integrating historical memory, domestic political calculus, and strategic ambiguity. His methodological rigor—archival research, policy tracing, discourse analysis—offers a template for examining territorial disputes in other fragile contexts. The work's emphasis on nationalist mobilization and elite signaling is particularly relevant for understanding how symbolic geography becomes a site of contestation. However, its bilateral focus may obscure the multilateral dimensions of conflict resolution, including the role of third-party mediation, regional institutions, and epistemic communities. The study invites comparative application to Red Sea islands, urban borderlands, and contested maritime zones.

David H. H. Lee (2019) in *The Making of Northeast Asia* argues that the region's emergence as a coherent geopolitical entity stems from deepening trilateral ties among China, Japan, and South Korea. Rather than viewing Northeast Asia as a fragmented zone of historical antagonism, Lee emphasizes the integrative power of economic interdependence and social exchange. The book traces how post-Cold War transformations, especially the rise of China and the democratization of South Korea, reshaped regional dynamics. Institutional mechanisms—such as trilateral summits and economic forums—began to formalize cooperation, even amid unresolved security tensions. Lee highlights the Korean Peninsula as both a pivot of instability and a catalyst for regional coordination. He also underscores the role of external

actors, particularly the United States, in shaping Northeast Asia's strategic architecture. Cultural flows and civil society linkages further reinforced a shared regional identity, despite nationalist undercurrents. He argues that the region's emergence as a coherent geopolitical entity stems from deepening trilateral ties among China, Japan, and South Korea. Rather than viewing Northeast Asia as a fragmented zone of historical antagonism, Lee emphasizes the integrative power of economic interdependence and social exchange. The book traces how post-Cold War transformations, especially the rise of China and the democratization of South Korea, reshaped regional dynamics. Institutional mechanisms—such as trilateral summits and economic forums—began to formalize cooperation, even amid unresolved security tensions. Lee highlights the Korean Peninsula as both a pivot of instability and a catalyst for regional coordination. He also underscores the role of external actors, particularly the United States, in shaping Northeast Asia's strategic architecture. Cultural flows and civil society linkages further reinforced a shared regional identity, despite nationalist undercurrents.

The 2022 volume *Geo-Politics in Northeast Asia*, edited by Akihiro Iwashita, Yong-Chool Ha, and Edward Boyle, presents a nuanced approach to understanding the geopolitics of the region. The editors and contributors adopt a multi-scalar perspective, emphasizing the dynamics of Northeast Asia as a whole rather than focusing exclusively on individual states. This approach highlights the contested political claims associated with the region and underscores the significance of local political forces and national interests in shaping its geopolitical landscape. By distinguishing between 'geopolitics' and 'geo-politics,' the volume draws attention to the concept of 'geo-power' and the spatiality of power, particularly in the margins of the region. Such a framework moves beyond traditional state-centric analyses to incorporate the political and economic influence of communities situated in peripheral areas.

A central theme of the work is the examination of specific subregional geographies, including maritime zones, terrestrial borderlands, and archipelagos, in the production of identity, culture, and economic activity. By focusing on these borderlands, the volume complements and extends existing literature on geopolitics and border studies. The contributors also situate contemporary developments within a historical and comparative context, analyzing the trajectories of political and economic change over time. This historical perspective challenges the application of Western intellectual frameworks to Northeast Asia, advocating instead for region-specific analytical models. Moreover, the volume offers a critical

appraisal of regionalism, noting the limited progress in fostering cooperation compared with other regions such as Europe or Southeast Asia. The editors argue that the absence of effective diplomatic mechanisms could heighten militarization and the potential for conflict, thereby underscoring the urgency of enhanced regional collaboration.

While the volume provides a valuable and innovative perspective on the geo-politics of Northeast Asia, certain challenges remain. The emphasis on local and subregional dynamics may complicate the development of cohesive regional policies, particularly given the entrenched national interests and security concerns that characterize the area. Additionally, the theoretical frameworks proposed, while conceptually compelling, require further empirical validation to determine their practical applicability in addressing contemporary geopolitical issues. Despite these limitations, the volume makes an important contribution by offering a fresh lens through which to analyze the complex and evolving geopolitical landscape of Northeast Asia.

Yong-Shik Lee's *Sustainable Peace in Northeast Asia* (2024) offers a comprehensive and historically grounded analysis of the region's persistent tensions, emphasizing the need for a multifaceted approach to achieve lasting peace. Lee employs a historical perspective to examine the complex political, military, and economic dynamics of Northeast Asia. He identifies key factors contributing to regional instability, including nationalism, historical grievances, and the strategic interests of both regional and external powers. The book delves into the roles of China, South Korea, North Korea, Japan, and Mongolia, highlighting their unique historical experiences and current geopolitical strategies. Additionally, Lee assesses the influence of major global actors such as the United States and Russia, exploring how their policies and alliances impact regional security and cooperation. In the concluding chapter, "Pathway to Peace and Stability in Northeast Asia," Lee outlines strategies for mitigating conflicts and fostering cooperation. He advocates for a nuanced understanding of regional histories and cultures, suggesting that such awareness can bridge divides and build trust among nations. Lee emphasizes the importance of multilateral dialogue, confidence-building measures, and incremental trust-building initiatives as essential components of a sustainable peace framework. He also discusses the potential role of Mongolia as a neutral mediator and facilitator in regional diplomacy. Shik-Lee's work contributes to the scholarly discourse on Northeast Asian security by providing a detailed, country-specific analysis and proposing practical solutions for peacebuilding. His interdisciplinary approach, combining historical context with political and economic analysis, offers valuable insights for policymakers and scholars seeking to understand and address the complexities of the region's

security landscape. The point is that region-building processes are underway in North East Asia, albeit in fragmented and uneven ways. Unlike in Europe or Southeast Asia, where institutionalized frameworks have provided continuity, regionalism in North East Asia is shaped by overlapping bilateral alliances, historical grievances, and persistent security rivalries. At the same time, deepening economic interdependence, transnational challenges such as climate change and energy security, and the growing need for crisis-management mechanisms are gradually creating functional pressures for cooperation. The result is a region-building dynamic that is incremental, pragmatic, and often driven by necessity rather than by shared identity or vision.

Finally, Deog Kim and Oran Young, the grand old man of Arctic studies teamed up in an interesting book on the interface between the North Pacific and the Arctic. The volume *North Pacific Perspectives on the Arctic: Looking Far North in Turbulent Times* by Jon-Deog Kim and Oran R. Young (Elgar, 2024) offers a critical reorientation of Arctic governance discourse by foregrounding the strategic interests and normative contributions of Northeast Asian actors. Departing from the conventional Euro-Atlantic framing of Arctic politics, the authors propose a regionally decentered analytical lens that integrates the perspectives of non-Arctic states—particularly South Korea, China, and Japan—whose economic, environmental, and geopolitical stakes in the Arctic are increasingly pronounced. Through an interdisciplinary methodology that combines international law, environmental science, and multilateral diplomacy, the book advances a model of inclusive governance rooted in science diplomacy, multi-level institutional engagement, and sustainable development.

This framework is particularly relevant to Northeast Asia in strategic and political terms. First, it underscores the region's growing entanglement with Arctic maritime routes, resource extraction, and climate-induced security risks, thereby linking Arctic stability to Northeast Asian resilience. Second, it positions Northeast Asian states not merely as peripheral observers but as normative actors capable of shaping global environmental regimes and contributing to cooperative security architectures. Third, by emphasizing dialogue and transparency, the book offers a counterweight to the intensifying strategic competition in the region, particularly between China, the United States, and Russia. In doing so, it opens pathways for Northeast Asian states to engage in Arctic governance without exacerbating regional tensions, thereby reinforcing the logic of interdependence and shared responsibility. Ultimately, Kim and Young's work provides both a conceptual and practical blueprint for Northeast Asia's constructive integration into Arctic affairs, with implications for regional stability, diplomatic innovation, and global environmental stewardship.

The research gaps identified by across the five works in our piece is strategically revealing. They point not only to thematic omissions but to structural blind spots in how Northeast Asian regionalism is conceptualized. Here's a synthesis of those gaps:

Transnational Environmental Governance — In *Geo-Politics in Northeast Asia*, Davis notes the absence of sustained analysis on ecological cooperation across borders. Despite the book's attention to maritime disputes and geopolitical tensions, it overlooks how environmental challenges—such as marine pollution, climate adaptation, and biodiversity loss—could catalyze new regional frameworks.

Urbanization and Regional Cooperation — In *The Making of Northeast Asia*, the gap lies in the book's limited engagement with urban processes. Davis argues that cities are not merely economic nodes but strategic actors in shaping cross-border connectivity, cultural diplomacy, and infrastructural integration. Their omission weakens the book's institutionalist claims.

Multilateral Mechanisms for Border Disputes — In *Japan's Border Issues*, Davis critiques the narrow bilateral lens. While the book excels in legal and historical detail, it fails to explore how regional institutions—such as ASEAN+3 or APEC—might mediate or transform border tensions through multilateral diplomacy.

Maritime Trade Networks and Strategic Implications — In *East Asia Before the West*, Davis identifies a historical gap: the book underplays the role of maritime commerce in shaping power relations and regional hierarchies. This limits its explanatory power regarding how trade routes influenced diplomatic norms and strategic behavior.

Digital Infrastructure and Regional Leadership — In *China, Japan and Regional Leadership in East Asia*, Davis flags the absence of digital systems—data networks, cyber governance, and AI infrastructure—as critical vectors of leadership. By focusing primarily on economic governance, the book misses how digital architectures are reshaping regional influence and institutional design.

Together, these gaps suggest a need for more integrative, cross-sectoral approaches to Northeast Asian studies—ones that foreground ecological systems, urban dynamics, multilateral diplomacy, maritime infrastructures, and digital sovereignty.

Scholarly contribution

First, by engaging critically with existing literature, we enrich

the discourse regarding Northeast Asia's geopolitical dynamics. Our focus on economic interdependence, cultural exchange, and institutional mechanisms enhances the understanding of regional relationships and the factors that promote cooperation despite historical antagonism.

Second, we expand the analytical framework by suggesting further exploration of economic ties, cultural diplomacy, and the dynamics of security. This broadening encourages fellow scholars to investigate underexplored dimensions, thereby deepening the scholarship in Northeast Asian studies. Third, we also promote interdisciplinary perspectives by advocating for the inclusion of technology, comparative studies, and the impact of nationalism. This integration can lead to more comprehensive analyses that draw insights from various fields such as economics, sociology, history, and political science.

Fourth, our contributions have practical implications for policymakers in the region. By articulating how cultural exchanges and effective institutions can mitigate tensions, our work highlights the connection between scholarship and actionable policy recommendations.

Fifth, our focus on contemporary issues, such as the role of external actors and technological influence, reflects an awareness of evolving dynamics, ensuring that scholarship remains relevant and applicable to today's challenges in Northeast Asia.

Sixth, by outlining avenues for further research, we provide a roadmap for scholars entering the field. Our suggestions guide inquiry into pressing topics, influencing future studies and under-scoring our role in shaping scholarly agendas.

In summary, our contributions facilitate a deeper understanding of Northeast Asia's complex interrelations in security, economic, and cultural dimensions, advancing both theoretical and empirical scholarship within the region.

Research Design

The research was designed as a qualitative analysis centered on examining the geopolitical dynamics of Northeast Asia, with a particular focus on the Korean Peninsula. This approach facilitated an in-depth exploration of historical contexts, contemporary relationships, and the implications of regional security issues. The study employed a systematic review of existing literature, policy documents, and expert analyses to gather comprehensive insights into the subject matter.

This is a desk job. The participants involved in this research included AI-driven analytical tools, specifically ChatGPT, AI Bing, and Sharly, which provided diverse

perspectives and interpretations. These systems processed a range of inputs related to the geopolitical landscape of Northeast Asia, synthesizing information from various scholarly and policy-oriented sources to produce coherent analyses.

The data collection utilized digital text input and retrieval methods to capture and analyze relevant documents, articles, and reports regarding Northeast Asia's political, economic, and social contexts. The tools employed were AI language models (ChatGPT, AI Bing, and Sharly) capable of retrieving information, generating summaries, and enhancing the analysis of existing data.

The procedures followed included:

Selection of Information Sources: Relevant literature, policy papers, and historical analyses were identified through a targeted search within AI capabilities.

Input Generation: Prompts were created to direct the AI tools toward specific aspects of the Northeast Asian geopolitical landscape, including critical issues such as nuclear proliferation, economic ties, and historical grievances.

Synthesis and Analysis: The AI models processed the input data, comparing findings across various documents and providing nuanced interpretations that highlight key themes and recommendations.

Replicability: To enable replication of this research, future analysts can similarly leverage AI-driven analytical tools, maintaining a structured approach to data collection, synthesis, and analysis. The process can be repeated by defining clear research questions, identifying pertinent sources of information, and utilizing comparable AI models to access, process, and analyze relevant content systematically.

This methodology not only enables a thorough investigation of the dynamics in Northeast Asia but also serves as a model for conducting similar studies using AI-driven analysis in geopolitical research.

We begin by addressing the geopolitical, economic and human aspects of security in the North East Asia, and then move on to the question of regional order in North East Asia. This provides us with the opportunity to address the question the multifaceted nature of peace-building in this corner of the world. We proceed examine the elements of a stable political order in North East Asia. If you can conceive it you can perceive it. We proceed to how to organize the region in institutional terms, dovetailing with the EU's penchant for strengthening of the multi-bilateral policy-mix overthere. Like that we end the analysis with the execution of the design on the North East Asia Stabilisation Forum.

The appendices contain three key documents: the DPRK-US Joint Statement, a draft treaty outlining the institutional framework of the forum, and a preliminary skeleton of a

Korean peace treaty intended to serve as a basis for further negotiations.

2. GEOPOLITICAL CONFLICTS IN NORTH-EAST ASIA

A conflict of a geopolitical nature can be defined as: A confrontation or dispute between states, regions, or political entities that arises from the pursuit of power, influence, or strategic advantage over territory, resources, security arrangements, or spheres of influence, often shaped by geography, history, and the balance of power in the international system.

Northeast Asia is a crucible of unresolved territorial tensions, where land and maritime disputes converge with historical grievances, strategic ambitions, and nationalist fervor. These conflicts—often frozen in time yet periodically inflamed—shape the region's security architecture and diplomatic calculus.

The most prominent land-based dispute is the **Kuril Islands/Northern Territories conflict** between Japan and Russia. Following World War II, the Soviet Union seized four islands northeast of Hokkaido—Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan, and the Habomai islets. Japan insists these are not part of the Kuril chain ceded under postwar arrangements, while Russia maintains sovereignty. The absence of a formal peace treaty between the two powers underscores the enduring nature of this stalemate.

On the Korean Peninsula, the **Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)** between North and South Korea is not a territorial dispute in the conventional sense, but it remains a flashpoint of unresolved sovereignty. The armistice of 1953 halted active hostilities without a peace treaty, leaving both states technically at war and claiming legitimacy over the entire peninsula.

Maritime disputes are more numerous and volatile. The **Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands** in the East China Sea are administered by Japan but claimed by both China and Taiwan. Though uninhabited, these islands are strategically located and potentially resource-rich, making them a focal point of Sino-Japanese rivalry. Naval patrols, airspace incursions, and diplomatic sparring have turned this into a symbol of regional power projection.

Further south, the **Dokdo/Takeshima dispute** pits South Korea against Japan over a pair of rocky islets in the Sea of Japan (East Sea). South Korea maintains effective control, but Japan continues to assert its claim. The dispute is deeply entwined with colonial memory and national identity, often surfacing in school textbooks, diplomatic exchanges, and cultural narratives.

Beyond these, the Yellow Sea and the East China Sea present a dense web of overlapping Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), particularly involving China, South Korea, and Japan. While these maritime boundary disputes often attract less public attention than the flashpoints in the South China Sea, they are no less consequential. The contested delineations affect critical domains such as fisheries management, offshore hydrocarbon exploration, and the regulation of shipping lanes that are vital to global commerce. The stakes are heightened by the combination of dwindling fish stocks, mounting energy demands, and the imperative to uphold freedom of navigation in waters that function as arteries of Northeast Asian trade. Moreover, these disputes are intertwined with broader questions of historical memory, unresolved wartime legacies, and shifting regional power balances, which make technical negotiations over EEZ boundaries inseparable from the larger geopolitics of East Asia.

At the same time, the absence of fully ratified maritime boundaries leaves room for recurring incidents at sea, from fishing vessel seizures to aerial encounters between coast guards and naval forces. Regional attempts at joint development, such as provisional fishing agreements or resource-sharing frameworks, have offered only fragile stopgaps rather than lasting solutions. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) provides a legal framework, but its interpretation remains contested, particularly in regard to islands and submerged features. As a result, maritime disputes here feed into the broader security dilemma of Northeast Asia, where even limited confrontations risk escalation. Ultimately, the East China Sea and Yellow Sea exemplify how technical boundary issues can quickly assume symbolic weight, reinforcing national identities while constraining the possibilities of cooperative governance.

Together, these disputes form a dense web of contested sovereignties. They are not merely about rocks or waters—they are about history, legitimacy, and the future balance of power in Northeast Asia. Their resolution remains elusive, not for lack of legal frameworks, but because they are embedded in the very architecture of postwar identity and regional rivalry.

3.ECONOMIC RESSOURCES IN NORTH-EAST ASIA

Northeast Asia is endowed with a diverse and strategically significant array of economic resources, encompassing natural, human, and technological capital. Energy resources form a critical component of the regional economic base. Fossil fuels, including oil and natural gas, are concentrated in Russia's Far East and in parts of China, while coal remains abundant in China and North Korea, serving as a major input for industrial production. Renewable energy potential is considerable, with coastal and inland regions offering opportunities for wind, solar, and hydropower development, particularly in China, Japan, and South Korea. Nuclear energy

infrastructure in Japan and South Korea complements conventional energy sources, contributing to electricity generation and high-tech expertise.



The region's mineral and raw material endowments are equally important. China dominates global production of rare-earth elements, which are essential for high-technology industries, renewable energy applications, and defense systems. In addition, metals such as iron, copper, zinc, and tungsten are mined in China, Russia, and North Korea. Strategic minerals, including graphite, lithium, and cobalt, are also present, providing critical inputs for batteries, electronics, and emerging clean technologies.

Agricultural and marine resources further enhance the economic resilience of Northeast Asia. China and South Korea produce rice, wheat, soybeans, and fruits, while North Korea relies heavily on subsistence agriculture. The surrounding seas—the Yellow Sea, East China Sea, and Sea of Japan—constitute rich fishing grounds, supporting both domestic consumption and export-oriented fisheries. Aquaculture is particularly significant in China and Japan, contributing to food security and regional trade.

Human capital in Northeast Asia represents a key economic and technological resource. Japan, South Korea, and China possess highly educated workforces with expertise in technology, engineering, and advanced manufacturing. The region has developed world-leading capabilities in semiconductors, robotics, electronics, and automotive industries, with China rapidly advancing in artificial intelligence, financial technology, and renewable energy sectors. The combination of skilled labor, robust research and development, and innovation ecosystems underpins regional competitiveness in high-value industries.

The industrial and infrastructure base of Northeast Asia

complements these human and natural resources. Industrial hubs, including China's Yangtze River Delta and Beijing-Tianjin corridor, South Korea's Seoul-Incheon-Busan axis, and Japan's Tokyo-Osaka corridor, host high-density manufacturing, logistics, and technology production. Major ports, such as Shanghai, Busan, Yokohama, and Vladivostok, facilitate global trade, while extensive transport networks, including high-speed rail, highways, and railways, enable domestic integration and regional connectivity. Financial centers in Tokyo, Seoul, and Shanghai further support investment, banking, and capital flows, reinforcing economic interdependence across the region.

The strategic implications of Northeast Asia's economic resources are profound. The distribution of energy, minerals, labor, technology, and infrastructure shapes regional security dynamics, economic resilience, and global supply chains. Control, access, and cooperative management of these resources influence regional power balances, making resource geography a critical factor in policy and strategic planning.

4. HUMAN SECURITY ISSUES IN NORTH -EAST ASIA

Human security is a comprehensive and multi-dimensional concept that emphasizes the protection and well-being of individuals and communities rather than focusing solely on national security or state-centric approaches. It encompasses various aspects of human life, recognizing that security is not merely the absence of conflict but also the presence of conditions that enable people to live with dignity and freedom. These human security issues necessitate a comprehensive approach involving regional cooperation, dialogue, and sustainable policy interventions aimed at alleviating the underlying socio-economic, environmental, and political challenges faced by the populations in Northeast Asia.

Application of Human Security to Northeast Asia

In Northeast Asia, encompassing northern China, Mongolia, the two Koreas, Japan, and eastern Siberia, the concept of human security reveals various challenges and opportunities that impact the lives of individuals and communities in the region. Here's how each aspect of human security applies to this context:

Personal Security

In North Korea, citizens face significant threats from state-sponsored violence, repression, and lack of personal freedoms. The regime's authoritarian nature leads to human rights abuses, creating an environment of fear. In South Korea, while South Koreans generally enjoy high personal safety, increased military tensions with the North can contribute to feelings of insecurity. Japan has high personal security levels,

but natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis pose threats that require effective disaster preparedness and response strategies.

Economic Security

Mongolia's economy is heavily reliant on mining, making it vulnerable to market fluctuations. Economic disparities exist, with rural areas experiencing higher rates of poverty. In northern China, many regions suffer from industrial pollution and economic inequality, impacting rural populations. Access to stable employment and living conditions is a pressing concern. In the two Koreas, economic disparities between North and South Korea are stark; North Korea suffers from extreme poverty and food insecurity, while South Korea boasts a robust economy but faces pressures from youth unemployment and housing shortages.

Health Security

In North Korea, the healthcare system is underfunded, limiting access to medical services. The population is vulnerable to outbreaks of diseases due to inadequate health infrastructure. In Mongolia and northern China, limited healthcare access in remote areas poses significant health risks. Environmental pollution further exacerbates health issues, particularly respiratory and chronic diseases. Both South Korea and Japan have advanced healthcare systems; however, challenges like an aging population and mental health issues require attention.

Food Security

Chronic food shortages plague North Korea due to mismanagement, sanctions, and natural disasters, leading to widespread malnutrition. Mongolia is vulnerable to climate variability, and livestock herders face risks to their livelihoods, impacting food availability. In northern China, rapid urbanization and environmental degradation threaten agricultural productivity and food sustainability.

Environmental Security

In Mongolia, desertification and environmental degradation impact livelihoods, particularly in rural communities. Sustainable resource management is critical. Northern China experiences severe air and water pollution in major industrial regions, affecting public health and the environment, as well as international relations. Japan's vulnerability to natural disasters necessitates effective environmental planning and disaster risk reduction strategies, particularly in a geologically active region.

Community Security

Tensions related to historical grievances, such as Japan's wartime actions during World War II, impact community relationships across the region. These grievances can lead to mistrust and social division. In regions like northern China, ethnic minorities often face discrimination and cultural suppression, undermining community cohesion.

Political Security

In North Korea, political repression restricts citizens' rights to participate in democracy, leading to widespread discontent. While South Korea has democratic processes in place, political polarization and external threats from the North can hinder effective governance. Japan and Mongolia maintain stable democratic governance, but challenges such as populism and political apathy can impact citizen engagement.

Addressing human security in Northeast Asia requires a multifaceted approach involving collaboration among regional actors. Prioritizing the protection of individuals' rights, promoting sustainable development, and fostering dialogue can enhance human security across the region, ultimately contributing to more stable and resilient communities. Efforts must focus on mitigating the interconnected challenges that affect personal, economic, health, environmental, community, and political security for sustainable peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia.

As we examine deeper into the cultural aspects, it is crucial to recognize how these initiatives intersect with national interests. While cultural exchange is imperative, it is equally important to understand its relationship with improved security arrangements. Having outlined the ways human security initiatives foster peace, the next logical step is to evaluate the importance of regional order in North East Asia.

5. REGIONAL ORDER IN NORTH EAST ASIA

A stable regional order is never self-evident; it emerges from the interplay of material power, institutional arrangements, and shared norms that govern interstate relations. In Northeast Asia, where historical memory, territorial disputes, and fluctuating hierarchies of power have long shaped state interactions, the foundations of stability can be traced back centuries. Understanding equilibrium in the region requires examining both its deep historical roots and the modern transformations that set the stage for contemporary dynamics.

From the 15th century onward, Northeast Asia was structured around hierarchical tributary relations, particularly under the Ming (1368–1644) and later Qing (1644–1912) dynasties in China. The Sinocentric order positioned China as the preeminent power, with Korea and the Ryukyu Kingdom

recognizing Chinese suzerainty through tribute missions, while Japan maintained a more autonomous posture, engaging selectively in trade and diplomacy. This system provided a form of stability: disputes were managed within clearly defined hierarchies, and the threat of large-scale conflict was limited by mutual recognition of roles and spheres of influence. Equilibrium was thus conceptualized less in terms of power parity and more as the maintenance of hierarchical order and ritualized norms of deference.

The early modern period saw the rise of Japan as a more assertive actor. During the Tokugawa era (1603–1868), Japan adopted a policy of relative isolation while consolidating domestic stability and a centralized authority. Meanwhile, Korea maintained its tributary relationship with China, balancing internal governance with careful diplomacy toward neighbors. Regional equilibrium was maintained through a combination of Chinese preeminence, Japanese isolationism, and Korea's cautious diplomacy, illustrating that stability in Northeast Asia historically depended on tacitly accepted hierarchies rather than formal institutions or alliance systems.

The 19th century brought dramatic disruptions. The Opium Wars, the decline of Qing authority, and the incursions of Western powers destabilized the traditional order. Japan's Meiji Restoration (1868) transformed it into a rising military and industrial power, capable of challenging China and later engaging in colonial expansion. The First Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05) marked the erosion of the Sinocentric order and the emergence of a multipolar, competitive Northeast Asia. Equilibrium in this period was fragile, characterized by shifting power hierarchies, contested borders, and the incursion of external imperial powers that introduced new strategic dynamics.

The early 20th century intensified instability. Japan's annexation of Korea (1910) and expansion into Manchuria, coupled with the decline of Qing China and the limited influence of a weakened Russia after 1917, produced a region in strategic flux. The period before World War II lacked formal institutions capable of managing rivalries; order relied on power projection and the ability of states to absorb or resist coercion. Equilibrium was largely defined through the dominance of Japan and the resistance of other regional actors, punctuated by episodic conflicts that reflected unresolved historical grievances and competition over territory and resources.

The post-World War II order represented a dramatic break from centuries of hierarchical and competitive instability. The defeat of Japan, the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and the U.S. security presence in Japan and Korea created a novel structure.

Equilibrium in this period was initially shaped by bipolarity, with the United States and the Soviet Union as the primary guarantors and challengers of stability, respectively. The Korean War crystallized the peninsula as a permanent frontline, echoing historical patterns in which unresolved historical and territorial disputes served as sources of tension. Thus, the concept of equilibrium in Northeast Asia has evolved from the maintenance of hierarchical tributary relations in the early modern period, through multipolar rivalry in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, to the post-World War II balance of great powers mediated by alliances and external security guarantees. Across this long historical arc, stability has depended on the recognition of relative power, the management of rivalries, and the capacity of dominant states to enforce or encourage compliance with prevailing norms. The implications for contemporary Northeast Asia are clear: without strong institutional mechanisms or historical reconciliation, equilibrium remains fragile, reliant on great-power calculations, alliance credibility, and tacit agreements that prevent escalation in flashpoints such as the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait.

Regional Dynamics in East Asia: Japan–South Korea, South Korea–China, and Trilateral Interactions

1. Japan–South Korea Bilateral Relations

Japan–South Korea relations are historically and politically complex, shaped predominantly by the legacy of Japanese colonial rule over Korea (1910–1945) and subsequent wartime issues, including forced labor and “comfort women” controversies. These historical grievances periodically disrupt diplomatic engagement, constraining both political dialogue and security cooperation.

Economically, however, the dyad is deeply integrated. Japan and South Korea maintain extensive trade, investment, and technological linkages, particularly in high-value sectors such as semiconductors, electronics, and automotive supply chains. Strategic collaboration is evident in shared concerns regarding North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs, yet security cooperation remains limited due to domestic political sensitivities and bilateral disputes.

Policy Implication: Strengthening economic ties requires mechanisms that insulate trade and investment from political and historical disputes. Initiatives could include sector-specific joint ventures in high-technology industries, co-development of green and digital infrastructure, and institutionalized economic dialogues that persist despite political tensions.

South Korea–China Bilateral Relations

The South Korea–China relationship is characterized by deep

economic interdependence, with China as South Korea’s largest trading partner. Key sectors include electronics, automobiles, semiconductors, and cultural industries. Politically, tensions arise around security issues, most notably the deployment of the U.S. THAAD missile defense system on the Korean Peninsula, which elicited economic countermeasures from China.

Strategically, South Korea seeks a careful balance between its U.S. security alliance and China’s regional influence. This balancing act underscores the need for multilevel diplomacy and diversified economic engagement to mitigate vulnerabilities.

Policy Implication: Economic strengthening should leverage China–South Korea complementarities in technology, green energy, and regional infrastructure while promoting multilateral frameworks that reduce exposure to unilateral political pressures. Joint investment funds and co-financed infrastructure projects could anchor resilience in the economic dyad.

Sino- Japanese Relations

The evolution of Sino-Japanese relations is a study in paradox—marked by deep cultural ties, devastating conflict, economic interdependence, and persistent mistrust. From ancient admiration to modern rivalry, the trajectory reflects both historical depth and contemporary complexity.

In antiquity, Japan absorbed Chinese influences in writing, architecture, religion, and governance. Yet by the late 19th century, the Meiji Restoration propelled Japan toward Westernization, while China struggled under foreign incursions. Japan’s victory in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) signaled a dramatic reversal of regional hierarchy, culminating in the annexation of Taiwan and Korea and the humiliation of the Qing dynasty.

The Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) was catastrophic. Japan’s invasion of China, including atrocities like the Nanjing Massacre, left indelible scars. These events remain central to Chinese national memory and continue to shape bilateral tensions.

After World War II, Japan’s pacifist constitution and U.S. alliance reoriented its foreign policy, while China underwent revolutionary transformation. Diplomatic normalization came only in 1972, when both nations recognized the strategic value of rapprochement amid Cold War dynamics. Economic ties flourished—Japan became a major investor in China’s reform-era boom, and trade soared.

Yet the relationship remains fraught. Disputes over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, historical revisionism, and visits by Japanese leaders to the Yasukuni Shrine provoke recurring crises. Despite shared interests in regional

stability and global trade, strategic trust is elusive. Since the 2000s, China's rise and Japan's security recalibrations have intensified competition, especially in maritime domains and technological spheres.

Today, Sino-Japanese relations oscillate between pragmatic cooperation and symbolic confrontation. They are bound by geography and economics, yet haunted by history and strategic rivalry. The future hinges not only on diplomacy, but on the ability of both societies to reconcile memory with mutual interest.

To implement existing global treaties between Japan and China—beyond the environmental domain—requires activating the latent potential of foundational agreements such as the **1978 Treaty of Peace and Friendship**, the **1972 Joint Communiqué**, and various sectoral accords in trade, aviation, fisheries, and maritime law. These treaties articulate principles of peaceful coexistence, mutual benefit, and non-hegemony, but their operationalization remains uneven. A robust implementation strategy would involve the following dimensions:

1. Institutional Deepening of the 1978 Treaty of Peace and Friendship

This treaty affirms peaceful dispute resolution, opposition to regional hegemony, and the promotion of economic and cultural ties. To implement it meaningfully, both states should establish a **Joint Strategic Dialogue Mechanism**—a standing body tasked with monitoring treaty compliance, mediating tensions (e.g., over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands), and coordinating diplomatic responses to regional crises.

2. Revitalization of Sectoral Agreements

The 1974–75 accords on trade, aviation, and fisheries were designed to operationalize the spirit of the 1972 Joint Communiqué. These should be updated to reflect contemporary challenges: digital trade, cybersecurity, and sustainable fisheries. For example, a **Digital Trade Protocol** could harmonize standards on data flows, privacy, and e-commerce platforms, while a **Joint Fisheries Management Board** could oversee quotas and conservation in contested waters.

3. Coordinated Implementation of UNCLOS Provisions

Both countries are parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), yet interpret its provisions differently—especially regarding EEZs and continental shelf claims. A bilateral **UNCLOS Implementation Commission** could reconcile divergent practices, facilitate joint submissions to international bodies, and reduce the risk of maritime escalation.

4. Cultural and Academic Exchange as Treaty Instruments

The 1978 treaty calls for deepening people-to-people ties. This can be operationalized through **Treaty-Based Exchange Programs**—joint university chairs, historical reconciliation forums, and collaborative research centers. These initiatives would not only fulfill treaty obligations but also build societal resilience against nationalist backlash.

5. Embedding Treaty Goals in Multilateral Forums

Japan and China should jointly advocate treaty principles—peaceful coexistence, non-hegemony, mutual benefit—within APEC, ASEAN+3, and the G20. This would reinforce bilateral commitments through multilateral norms and buffer against bilateral volatility.

In sum, implementing global treaties between Japan and China demands more than diplomatic ceremony. It requires institutional innovation, legal harmonization, and strategic foresight—anchoring bilateral cooperation in durable, adaptive mechanisms that reflect both historical commitments and contemporary realities.

The Sino-Japanese rivalry

Having said that, the Sino-Japanese rivalry has evolved into a complex and paradoxical configuration characterized by deep economic interdependence and persistent strategic mistrust. While bilateral trade volumes remain substantial, surpassing \$290 billion in 2024, the relationship is increasingly shaped by competing visions of regional order, divergent security postures, and infrastructural competition. Japan's alliance with the United States has intensified, marked by its 2022 National Security Strategy and plans to double defense spending, including the acquisition of counterstrike capabilities. This security alignment, while enhancing deterrence, complicates Japan's aspirations for autonomous regional leadership and limits its diplomatic flexibility vis-à-vis China.

Simultaneously, both states are engaged in a contest over developmental influence. China's Belt and Road Initiative continues to expand its footprint across Asia, while Japan has responded with the Partnership for Quality Infrastructure, emphasizing transparency, sustainability, and rule-of-law principles. This infrastructural rivalry reflects deeper normative tensions between extractive and ethical models of regional governance. Moreover, Japan's economic statecraft has become more centralized, with strategic sectors such as high-speed rail and digital systems receiving targeted support from the Prime Minister's Office and METI.

To strengthen governance and counteract Japan's relative decline in trading power, a multi-dimensional reform

agenda is underway. Corporate governance reforms, including amendments to the Companies Act, aim to enhance earning power and encourage bold investment. The Tokyo Stock Exchange's 2023 directive urging firms to align management with cost of capital and stock price has catalyzed a wave of share buybacks and reduced cross-shareholdings, thereby improving transparency and investor confidence. At the industrial level, Japan is divesting from low-margin legacy sectors and consolidating around high-value domains such as green energy, advanced materials, and digital infrastructure. Firms like Hitachi and JSR exemplify this strategic pivot, shedding underperforming subsidiaries and refocusing on globally competitive technologies.

Japan's normative leverage lies in its capacity to shape regional standards in digital governance, infrastructure quality, and environmental cooperation. By promoting ethical AI, inclusive digital economies, and resilient urban systems, Japan can reposition itself as a rule-setting actor rather than a reactive power. This requires not only institutional innovation but also a recalibration of its diplomatic posture—one that balances alliance commitments with regional engagement and foregrounds multilateralism over bilateral containment.

Competing Visions

China and Japan articulate fundamentally divergent visions of regional order in East Asia, shaped by contrasting historical experiences, strategic cultures, and institutional preferences. These visions are not merely rhetorical but embedded in competing architectures of influence, governance, and legitimacy.

China's vision is anchored in a hierarchical, state-centric model that privileges sovereignty, non-interference, and infrastructural dominance. Through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China promotes a connectivity regime that is pragmatic, bilateral, and often opaque, emphasizing economic corridors, port development, and digital infrastructure. Its strategic posture in the South and East China Seas, coupled with a growing military footprint, reflects a Sinocentric worldview in which regional stability is maintained through deference to Chinese leadership. Beijing's approach to multilateralism is instrumental: institutions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation or the AIIB are leveraged to consolidate influence rather than to delegate authority.

Japan, by contrast, envisions a liberal, rules-based regional order grounded in transparency, inclusivity, and institutional pluralism. The Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy exemplifies this orientation, integrating economic diplomacy, security partnerships, and normative leadership. Japan's emphasis on quality infrastructure, ethical AI, and maritime law reflects a commitment to multilateral norms and procedural legitimacy. Tokyo's strategic alliances—with the United States, Australia, India, and ASEAN—are designed not

to contain China per se, but to preserve an open regional architecture resistant to coercive dominance.

To soften the rivalry in multilateral terms, several pathways merit consideration. First, institutional layering can provide a buffer: forums such as ASEAN+3, the East Asia Summit, and the Trilateral China-Japan-Korea Summit offer platforms for dialogue that dilute bilateral antagonism. Second, functional cooperation in non-sensitive domains—such as environmental governance, disaster relief, and pandemic response—can build trust incrementally. Third, third-party market cooperation (TPMC), despite its asymmetries, remains a viable mechanism for joint investment in Southeast Asia, provided technical and regulatory gaps are addressed. Fourth, civil society and epistemic communities should be empowered to shape regional norms, particularly in digital governance and climate adaptation, where state interests often converge.

Ultimately, softening the rivalry requires a shift from zero-sum narratives to co-governance frameworks that recognize interdependence without erasing asymmetry. This demands not only diplomatic innovation but a recalibration of strategic intent—one that privileges coexistence over competition and resilience over dominance.

Trilateral Relations: Japan–South Korea–China

At the center of the regional order are the three primary Northeast Asian states: Japan, South Korea, and China. These form a core trilateral cluster where economic interdependence, historical grievances, and strategic competition intersect. Japan and South Korea maintain a relationship characterized by strong economic integration in high-technology sectors, trade, and supply chains, yet bilateral security cooperation is periodically constrained by historical disputes. South Korea and China share a highly interdependent economic relationship, with China as South Korea's largest trading partner, but diplomatic and strategic frictions—most notably regarding North Korea and missile defense deployments—require careful management.

Surrounding this trilateral core are external actors whose policies and engagement shape the broader regional order. The United States operates as both a security guarantor and strategic balancer, linking closely with Japan and South Korea through defense alliances while seeking to deter destabilizing actions from North Korea and manage the rise of China. The European Union functions primarily as an economic and normative actor, promoting trade, sustainable development, and rules-based governance through multilateral engagement. Russia occupies a strategic and economic axis, particularly

in the energy and infrastructure domains, bridging its Far East territories with Northeast Asian markets and participating in multilateral security and environmental frameworks.

The strategic map can be conceptualized in three overlapping dimensions. The **economic dimension** emphasizes interdependence through trade, investment, joint technological development, and infrastructure projects. Here, Japan–South Korea cooperation in semiconductors, South Korea–China integration in technology and manufacturing, and potential trilateral investment funds or green energy initiatives form the key nodes of collaboration. The **security dimension** includes alliance structures, deterrence strategies, and crisis management mechanisms. U.S.–Japan–South Korea coordination dominates the security layer, while China and Russia provide strategic counterweights that require calibrated engagement to prevent escalation. The **diplomatic and governance dimension** encompasses multilateral institutions, dialogue frameworks, and norm-setting initiatives. Trilateral secretariats, East Asia Summit mechanisms, and ASEAN-related dialogues function as platforms to manage disputes, promote transparency, and maintain continuity in economic and security cooperation.

Effective governance of the Northeast Asian order relies on reinforcing these dimensions simultaneously. Economic cooperation must be insulated from historical and political tensions, with joint projects and co-financed initiatives creating durable interdependence. Security arrangements require clear communication channels and crisis protocols to prevent miscalculation, particularly in maritime, nuclear, and cyber domains. Diplomatic mechanisms must institutionalize dialogue, mediation, and norm enforcement, ensuring that trilateral and multilateral cooperation can withstand shifts in bilateral relations.

In essence, Northeast Asia is a layered network of interdependent actors, where the stability of the region is contingent on the continuous alignment of economic interests, security frameworks, and diplomatic governance. External actors such as the United States, the European Union, and Russia can reinforce the resilience of this network, while the core trilateral dyads must actively coordinate to transform historical tensions into structured cooperation, thereby achieving a predictable and stable regional order.

The trilateral relationship among Japan, South Korea, and China operates under a dual logic of cooperation and constraint. Economic interdependence provides a strong incentive for dialogue, as all three countries constitute a core hub of global trade, production, and technological development. Trilateral forums, including the East Asia Summit (EAS) and various environmental and economic dialogue mechanisms, provide platforms for policy coordination.

However, historical legacies, territorial disputes, and competing regional ambitions constrain the effectiveness of

trilateral cooperation in security and governance. The trilateral framework has produced limited policy outcomes, primarily in areas of economic collaboration, environmental standards, and crisis communication. Security coordination remains ad hoc and largely mediated by external powers, notably the United States.

Empirical trade data provide further insight into the dynamics of economic interdependence in Northeast Asia. Despite the geographic proximity of China, Japan, and South Korea, intra-regional trade remains relatively modest compared to their global trade volumes. In 2018, trade among the three countries within the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) framework accounted for only 19.8 percent of their combined global trade (China Leather Industry Association, 2018). At the broader Asian level, regional integration is more pronounced: in 2022, 57 percent of Asia's trade value was generated within the region, up slightly from 54 percent in 2000 (McKinsey & Company, 2022).

Bilateral trade figures underscore both the scale and asymmetry of these linkages. In 2022, trade between China and South Korea reached approximately US\$362.3 billion, while trade between China and Japan stood at US\$357.4 billion (CGTN, 2023). Taken together, intra-regional trade among China, Japan, and Korea (CJK) amounted to US\$769.5 billion in 2022, out of a total goods trade volume of roughly US\$9.37 trillion among them (Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat, 2022). This indicates that intra-regional trade, while significant in absolute terms, represented about 8–9 percent of the total.

The data reveal a striking paradox: though Northeast Asia pulses with economic exchange, it paradoxically limps behind in intra-regional trade intensity. This curious contradiction—commerce without cohesion—underscores a deeper dilemma. Despite the dizzying dance of dollars and deals, the region remains institutionally ill-equipped to defuse disputes at sea. Economic interdependence, stripped of structure and synergy, has failed to forge the frameworks needed to tame territorial tensions. The promise of prosperity has not precipitated political peace; instead, persistent rivalries ripple beneath the surface of shared markets. In this fractured fabric of regional relations, trade thrives, yet trust falters. The absence of agile, adaptive agreements leaves Northeast Asia adrift—rich in resources, poor in reconciliation. Thus, the region's economic entanglement, though intense, is insufficient to provide the conditions for reconciliation and political maturity, a hallmark of most of the Asian region.

Prospects for a China-South Korea and Sino-Japanese FTAs

The prospect of a China–Japan–South Korea free trade agreement (CJK FTA) would constitute a significant structural development for Northeast Asian political economy, with consequences that extend beyond tariff schedules to encompass production networks, technological governance, alliance politics and the strategic calculus of third actors — most notably the European Union. This essay synthesizes recent policymaking signals and scholarship to assess how a trilateral FTA would reconfigure regional trade patterns and the security architecture of Northeast Asia and evaluates the principal interests, objectives and stakes that the EU would confront in response.

A CJK FTA would be expected to deepen already dense intra-regional economic linkages by reducing formal trade barriers and by harmonizing rules that govern cross-border inputs. Recent ministerial dialogue among the three governments has explicitly sought to strengthen regional trade and to explore a comprehensive FTA, a political signal that practical negotiations are being taken seriously after a prolonged period of stasis. Economically, lower tariffs and clearer rules of origin would lower transaction costs for multi-stage manufacturing processes and encourage vertical specialization across the three economies, reinforcing patterns in which Chinese scale is combined with Japanese and Korean sophistication in intermediate and capital goods. The likely commercial trajectory is therefore one of incremental supply-chain reorientation toward regional sourcing, greater cross-border investment in manufacturing footprints, and sectoral winners in automobiles, consumer electronics, batteries and logistics, tempered by persistent protection or carve-outs for politically sensitive domestic sectors. Empirical and theoretical work on prior attempts at trilateral integration underscores that such effects are feasible but will be moderated by domestic politics and the configuration of negotiating concessions.

At the same time, any gains in market efficiency would be uneven because of contemporaneous constraints imposed by technology governance and export-control regimes. In the domain of advanced semiconductors and other dual-use technologies, tighter export controls and allied efforts to restrict the transfer of sensitive equipment will limit the extent to which trade liberalization can be translated into deep technological integration. The United States and like-minded partners have tightened controls on semiconductor transfers to China, a policy that generates cross-border spillovers and complicates trilateral liberalization in high-technology sectors; academic and policy analyses emphasize that export controls both blunt trade growth in affected product lines and incentivize supply-chain relocation and upstream substitution. Consequently, the CJK FTA would most plausibly produce a bifurcated outcome: robust liberalization and supply-chain densification in “safe” or conventional goods, alongside guarded, state-sensitive corridors for strategic

technologies where national security logics preserve restrictions.

The security implications are inherently political because deeper economic interdependence alters incentives for both cooperation and coercion. On the one hand, enhanced trade linkages raise the economic costs of severe interstate confrontation and create institutionalized channels for dispute resolution and bureaucratic contact that can dampen misperception. On the other hand, closer commercial ties concentrate leverage, particularly in China’s favor given its market size; an integrated market gives the most economically dominant partner non-military instruments that can be deployed in crises. Moreover, the evolution of a formalized trilateral economic architecture would place Japan and South Korea in a more complex alignment calculus vis-à-vis their entrenched security relationships with the United States. Scholarship on regional institutional design suggests that absent explicit political safety valves or parallel security arrangements, the emergence of a large economic block risks generating friction with existing alliance structures and could incentivize strategic hedging or “multi-alignment.”

For the European Union, the emergence of an effective CJK FTA would intersect with multiple, sometimes competing, strategic objectives. The EU’s core commercial interest is market access and predictable trading conditions for European exporters and investors. South Korea and Japan are already significant EU partners for goods and services, and closer trilateral integration could reconfigure competitive dynamics in sectors where European firms compete — for example, automobiles, industrial machinery and green technologies — by privileging intra-regional suppliers through preferential margins and rules of origin. The EU’s economic diplomacy therefore faces a potential trade diversion effect: a well-crafted CJK preference set could reduce the price competitiveness of European goods in Northeast Asian markets and encourage buyers to source regionally. Data published by EU trade authorities underscore the existing importance of bilateral links (for instance, the EU’s substantial trade with South Korea), which would be shaped by any regional preferential arrangement.

Beyond narrow commercial stakes, the CJK FTA would test the EU’s broader strategic objective of “de-risking” economic dependencies without pursuing wholesale decoupling. European policy documents and statements emphasize the need to safeguard strategic autonomy while engaging economically where it is in Europe’s interest. A trilateral FTA that accelerates Asia-centric value chains in technologies critical to net-zero transitions or digital infrastructure could either exacerbate EU vulnerabilities in upstream inputs or create opportunities for new

partnering arrangements, depending on the degree of openness and the alignment of regulatory standards. The EU would therefore have to weigh whether to seek regulatory equivalence and market access through bilateral negotiation with members of the CJK arrangement, to bolster its own trade agreements in the Indo-Pacific as a countervailing strategy, or to deepen industrial alliances with like-minded partners to secure critical inputs. Recent EU policy choices toward diversified partnerships in Asia suggest a tilt toward engagement with an emphasis on resilience and standards coherence.

Strategically, the EU's stake in the security architecture of Northeast Asia is subtler but no less consequential. Europe benefits from regional stability that secures global trade routes, preserves the rules-based order and reduces the risk of disruptive coercive measures (for example, sanctions-style economic retaliation) that can spill across global markets. A CJK FTA that produced either a durable, institutionalized forum for economic cooperation or, alternatively, an arrangement that increased China's leverage without commensurate conflict-management mechanisms would each have repercussions for the EU's diplomatic posture. The latter scenario could complicate the EU's effort to balance economic engagement with normative commitments to market openness and human-rights standards, forcing European policymakers to recalibrate export controls, investment screening and outreach to allies. The EU's recent push to conclude or upgrade trade agreements with Asian partners and to pursue investment screening and "de-risking" strategies signals an awareness of these stakes and a preference for hedging rather than exclusion.

Policy options for the EU therefore fall into complementary tracks. First, the EU could pursue proactive economic diplomacy by negotiating or upgrading bilateral agreements with one or more CJK members to preserve European market access and to align regulatory frameworks where feasible. Second, the EU could intensify cooperation with the United States and other partners on export-control interoperability and supply-chain resilience initiatives, thereby seeking to shape the governance of strategic sectors even as regional trade integration proceeds in non-sensitive areas. Third, the EU could invest in diversification and in strategic upstream capacities — for instance in green tech supply chains — to reduce the degree of exposure to any single regional bloc. Each of these tracks entails tradeoffs between commercial opportunity and strategic autonomy, but together they would allow the EU to remain an active stakeholder in the institutional evolution of Northeast Asia.

Finally, any assessment must incorporate two important caveats. Negotiations for a CJK FTA have a long antecedent marked by episodic progress and recurrent domestic obstacles, so projected outcomes are contingent on political will and the architecture of carve-outs. Moreover, the

contemporary policy environment is characterized by competing technological governance regimes; export controls and national security-driven economic policies will materially constrain how deep and how fast market integration can become in advanced-technology sectors. In sum, a CJK FTA would plausibly foster greater regional trade integration and supply-chain densification while simultaneously reshaping incentives in the security domain; for the EU the agreement would present both commercial risks from trade diversion and strategic challenges that would call for calibrated diplomatic, regulatory and industrial responses if European interests and objectives are to be preserved.

Issue-Specific Developments

Transnational Environmental Governance as a Catalyst for Regional Cooperation

The *Tripartite Environment Ministers Meeting* (TEMM) between China, Japan, and South Korea exemplifies fragile but persistent efforts at regional environmental governance. While largely consultative, it has facilitated joint research on transboundary air pollution, notably PM2.5 diplomacy. The *Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (LTP)* program has produced neutral scientific data that tempers nationalist blame narratives. However, governance remains weakly institutionalized, with overlapping mandates and limited civil society participation.

Urban diplomacy is emerging as a strategic modality. Seoul, Tokyo, and Shanghai increasingly engage in city-to-city cooperation on climate, transport, and cultural exchange. Parag Khanna's concept of "diplomacy" captures this shift, where mayors and metropolitan regions act as quasi-diplomatic actors, leveraging infrastructure projects—such as high-speed rail corridors and smart city platforms—to deepen regional ties. Yet, urbanization remains under-theorized in mainstream regionalism literature.

The *Camp David Trilateral Summit* (2023) between the U.S., Japan, and South Korea marked a shift toward minilateral security cooperation. While not a formal dispute resolution mechanism, it signals a move away from bilateralism toward coordinated deterrence and consultation frameworks. Meanwhile, the *China-Japan-South Korea Trilateral Summit* (2024) emphasized economic cooperation, sidestepping territorial issues. The failure to institutionalize OSCE-style mechanisms reflects enduring mistrust and historical grievances.

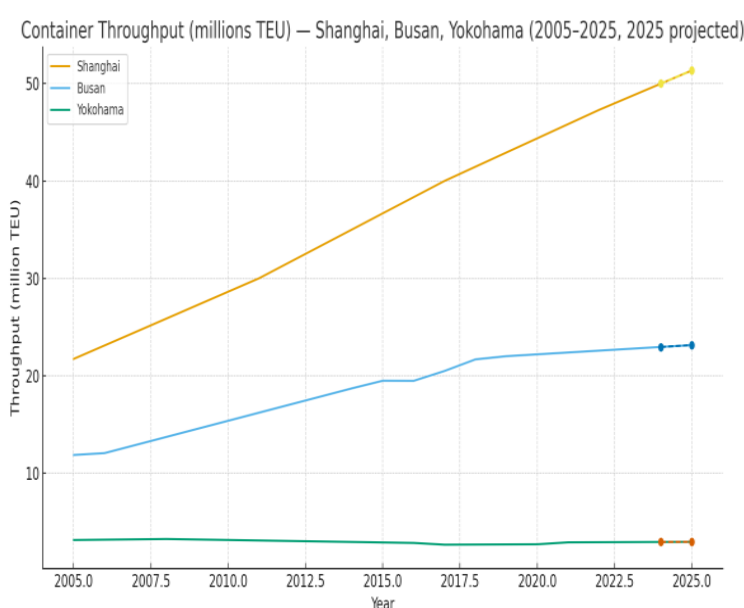
Northeast Asia's container ports—Shanghai, Busan, Yokohama—form one of the world's most integrated maritime networks. The rise of intra-Asian shipping routes

and the “China Plus One” strategy are reshaping supply chains, with Vietnam and India gaining prominence. Maritime chokepoints and fleet ownership patterns (China, Japan, Korea) also reflect strategic leverage. Yet, disruptions from COVID-19 and geopolitical tensions expose vulnerabilities in these networks.

Shanghai shows rapid and consistent growth, rising from 32.5M TEUs in 2012 to 49.0M in 2023. It remains the world’s busiest container port, reflecting China’s centrality in global supply chains. **Busan** grows steadily from 17.0M to 22.75M TEUs, consolidating its role as a transshipment hub and gateway to Northeast Asia. **Yokohama**, while stable, lags behind with modest growth from 2.7M to 3.5M TEUs, reflecting Japan’s shift toward higher-value logistics and regional redistribution. This divergence illustrates the

strategic asymmetries in maritime infrastructure and offers a compelling lens for analyzing regional integration, resilience, and competition.

Busan is South Korea’s primary container port and one of the world’s largest, handling over 22 million TEUs annually. It functions mainly as a transshipment hub for Northeast Asia, but its growth has slowed as it nears physical and operational capacity while competition from Chinese mega-ports intensifies. To raise throughput, Busan needs to deepen automation and digital integration by introducing fully automated terminals and AI-driven yard management systems. Expanding the New Port area into a smart port using digital twin technologies and 5G-based logistics systems would reduce congestion and vessel idle time.



Strengthening hinterland connectivity is equally important, linking the port more efficiently to Korea’s industrial heartlands and to cross-border logistics corridors reaching China and Japan. Faster customs clearance and better multimodal connections can shift Busan from being mainly a transshipment point to a true regional gateway.

Busan should also work to attract strategic alliances with major global shipping lines by offering dedicated terminals or preferential berths to lock in long-term, high-volume contracts. This would ensure a steady stream of vessel calls and container flows. Investment in green port infrastructure, such as shore power systems, LNG bunkering facilities, and low-emission logistics operations, would further enhance Busan’s appeal as stricter emissions regulations come into force. Governance-wise, the Busan Port Authority should retain public ownership and regulatory control but expand joint ventures with leading global terminal operators like PSA International, DP World, and Hutchison Ports. Cooperation with Korean shipping lines such as HMM and SM Line and with

regional logistics firms should be deepened to secure integrated supply chain traffic. Establishing formal operational partnerships with Chinese and Japanese shipping consortia could also transform Busan into a shared hub for intra-Asian transshipment, generating economies of scale.

Yokohama stands in a very different position. Once Japan’s busiest port, it has steadily lost market share to Tokyo and other regional hubs, now handling fewer than three million TEUs per year. Its infrastructure has aged and it suffers from limited hinterland space. Reviving throughput requires a shift in role and positioning. Yokohama should be functionally integrated into the broader Keihin Port complex alongside Tokyo and Kawasaki, with shared scheduling, coordinated berthing, and unified customs clearance. This would remove duplication and improve efficiency. Rather than competing head-on for bulk container traffic, Yokohama should specialise in high-value and time-sensitive cargo such as

electronics, pharmaceuticals, and cold chain logistics, where revenue per TEU is higher and stable liner services can be anchored.

Physical modernisation is essential. The port needs deeper quays, larger cranes, and digitised yard systems to handle new-generation ultra-large container vessels, or else mainline carriers will bypass it. Surrounding the port with bonded logistics parks, value-added processing zones, and distribution centres could attract shippers who want integrated import-processing-export capabilities, creating new cargo flows. The City of Yokohama and Japan's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism should maintain public ownership while bringing in private terminal operators, such as Mitsui OSK Lines, NYK Line, or even foreign partners, through concession agreements. Cooperation with Tokyo Port authorities is critical to build a joint operational platform, and partnerships with Japanese industrial exporters and regional feeder networks from Korea, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia could secure regular container flows.

Busan's future depends on scale, technology, and regional integration, while Yokohama's revival rests on specialisation, modernisation, and integration within the Keihin cluster. Both ports would benefit from a landlord port model, in which public authorities set long-term strategic goals and private operators provide capital and operational efficiency. This combination of public direction and private execution could enable Busan to consolidate its status as a regional hub and help Yokohama recover relevance as a specialised gateway port.

China's push for a *Digital Silk Road* and Japan's AI voucher programs illustrate competing models of digital regionalism. Youth-led initiatives in Northeast Asia, supported by the UN's Futuring Peace program, advocate for inclusive digital economies, AI literacy hubs, and ethical standards for digital governance. However, digital divides, data sovereignty tensions, and fragmented regulatory regimes hinder cohesive leadership. The absence of a regional digital compact remains a critical gap.

Policy Implication: Effective trilateral governance requires institutionalized mechanisms that separate economic and political disputes from functional collaboration. Recommendations include:

1. **Economic Integration:** Establish trilateral industrial and technological partnerships, particularly in semiconductors, green energy, and digital infrastructure, with governance structures that protect against bilateral disruptions.
2. **Institutional Frameworks:** Create a permanent trilateral secretariat with clear mandates for policy coordination, conflict resolution, and monitoring of joint initiatives.
3. **Strategic Dialogue:** Maintain high-level trilateral security dialogues focusing on regional stability,

crisis management, and North Korea, while keeping mechanisms flexible to adapt to shifts in bilateral relations.

4. **Multilevel Engagement:** Incorporate subnational and private-sector stakeholders in trilateral initiatives to sustain continuity even when national-level politics become strained.

The East Asian dyads—Japan–South Korea and South Korea–China—exhibit a pattern of economic interdependence intertwined with political friction. Strengthening these dyads economically requires insulated sectoral cooperation, joint investment, and institutionalized dialogue mechanisms. For trilateral governance, durable frameworks separating economic collaboration from historical and territorial disputes are essential. A structured approach combining economic integration, institutionalization, and multilevel dialogue can enhance resilience, foster regional stability, and expand the trilateral agenda beyond ad hoc cooperation.

The United States and North Korea

The sudden termination of the Pacific war in August 1945 and the unconditional surrender of Imperial Japan precipitated an immediate and consequential reordering of power across East Asia. In Korea, the abrupt collapse of twenty-two years of Japanese colonial rule left a polity with a nascent and fragmented indigenous leadership and no ready mechanism for self-government. Under pressure of events and time, American planners proposed a dividing line at the thirty-eighth parallel as a convenient administrative demarcation: Soviet forces would accept the surrender north of the line and U.S. forces south of it. Though originally intended as a temporary arrangement, the parallel quickly assumed durable political significance as Soviet and American occupation policies hardened, indigenous factionalism deepened, and Cold War rivalry intensified; what began as an expedient administrative measure thus calcified into the permanent partition of the peninsula and the institutional separation of two antagonistic states. The territorial and institutional bifurcation created by these decisions shaped the region's strategic environment in ways that have persisted for eight decades, ultimately producing a heavily militarized border, episodic wars and crises, and divergent developmental trajectories for the two Koreas.

The institutional consequences of the post-1945 division were immediate and enduring. The Korean War (1950–1953) congealed the thirty-eighth parallel as the effective military demarcation line even as the armistice left the peninsula formally divided and unreconciled; the conflict entrenched U.S. treaty relationships and basing

arrangements in the region, catalyzed the militarization of the Cold War in East Asia, and produced long-term trajectories of authoritarian consolidation in the North and, later, democratic development in the South. Over the subsequent decades the divergence between Pyongyang's pursuit of strategic deterrence and Seoul's integration into the liberal economic order generated a persistent security dilemma. As North Korea invested in nuclear weapons and increasingly sophisticated delivery systems, the peninsula became the locus of a triadic strategic competition among the United States, China, and Russia, one in which alliance politics, nonproliferation burdens, and humanitarian concerns have remained tightly entangled.

This history matters for contemporary policy because the origin of the division—the hurried drawing of a line in 1945 and the inability to convert a temporary occupational convenience into a legitimate, inclusive political settlement—left a legacy of unaddressed political claims, mutual insecurity, and institutional mistrust. Those structural features explain why intermittent diplomacy has had only limited success: Pyongyang's strategic calculus is shaped by an enduring imperative to ensure regime survival in an environment it construes as inherently hostile, and Seoul's political space for compromise has been constrained by domestic politics and alliance dynamics. The result is a security complex in which the presence of a nuclear-armed DPRK is both a symptom and a driver of regional instability, and where any attempt to alter the status quo must reckon simultaneously with the strategic priorities of China, the political constraints facing South Korea, and domestic constituencies in Washington that oscillate between coercive pressure and episodic summitry.

Contemporary American policy must therefore be grounded in a realistic appraisal of what is achievable. Since 2018, high-level summit diplomacy produced important symbolic breakthroughs—the Singapore summit of June 2018 marked the first meeting between a sitting U.S. president and the North Korean leader, and subsequent encounters in Hanoi and at Panmunjom underscored that unprecedented access alone, however dramatic, does not guarantee substantive agreement. The Hanoi summit in February 2019 ended in a mutual failure to bridge expectations: the United States sought concrete, verifiable steps toward denuclearization sufficient to dismantle Pyongyang's strategic program, while North Korea sought sanctions relief and security guarantees calibrated by steps that would be politically and technically reversible for Washington. The substantive gap was compounded by inadequate preparatory work on verification modalities and by domestic political pressures that limited the range of concessions any U.S. president could credibly offer; the upshot was that summitry stalled without a durable, verifiable bargain.

More recently, assessments by leading policy institutions have shifted toward recommending a pragmatic reorientation of

U.S. goals: rather than pursuing immediate, complete denuclearization as a precondition for normal relations, several analysts argue that a defensible and politically viable strategy would prioritize risk reduction, stabilization, and the construction of credible, verifiable confidence-building measures that limit the danger of escalation while keeping open pathways for longer-term diplomacy. This approach acknowledges the practical reality that Pyongyang has entrenched aspects of its nuclear posture—an evolution that the regime has described in categorical terms, rendering wholesale near-term reversal improbable—and therefore places a premium on measures that reduce the risks those capabilities pose to U.S. forces, allies, and regional civilians.

Factoring in North Korea's sense of security

North Korea's perception of national security is shaped by several key factors that influence its policies and behaviors.

North Korea believes that a strong military, particularly its nuclear arsenal, is essential for ensuring its national security. The regime views its military capability as a deterrent against potential aggression from perceived external threats, particularly from the United States and South Korea.

Historical grievances stemming from the Korean War and ongoing tensions with South Korea significantly inform North Korea's security outlook. The legacy of conflict contributes to a deep-rooted perception of insecurity and the need for vigilance against external incursions.

The survival of the Kim regime is paramount in North Korea's security calculations. This belief drives a focus on consolidating power, suppressing dissent, and ensuring loyalty among the military and governance structures to prevent any threats to the regime's stability.

Economic challenges and reliance on foreign aid make North Korea vulnerable. The regime perceives economic stability as integral to national security, prompting policies that prioritize self-reliance (Juche) and attempts to develop key sectors while remaining resistant to external economic pressures.

North Korea's relationships with other nations, particularly China and Russia, play a vital role in its security perceptions. Relying on these countries for political support and economic assistance enhances its strategic position and provides a counterbalance to Western influence.

The regime employs propaganda to reinforce resilience and national pride among its citizens. This propaganda emphasizes the idea of external threats, fostering a collective identity that underscores the need for unity

against perceived enemies.

North Korea's alliances, particularly with China, are crucial for its security policies. The perceived support from these allies influences its stance in international negotiations and regional conflicts.

The impact of human security issues, including food security, health, and welfare of the populace, also shapes North Korea's sense of security. The regime often emphasizes the need to protect its populace to maintain legitimacy, intertwining national security with domestic stability.

In the words of Kim: "If the United States drops the absurd obsession with denuclearizing us and accepts reality, and wants genuine peaceful coexistence, there is no reason for us not to sit down with the United States". Thus, the overarching goal must be for the US to recognize North Korea and open an Embassy and address Pyongyang's sense of security and strategic challenges in a sustained manner tied to a peace treaty between South Korea and North Korea as supported by multilateral engagement out of the North-East Stabilisation Forum. This is not disarmament but will provide the conditions for peace through foreclosure of one of last chapters of World War II. It is doable, desirable, détente.

Overall, North Korea's perception of national security is complex, intertwining historical grievances, military capabilities, regime survival, and economic vulnerabilities. These factors drive its policies and reactions to external pressures, contributing to the ongoing dynamics of security in Northeast Asia. These have to be addressed head-on. Working around the issues and second-guessing what makes Pyongyang tick won't work anymore.

The US-Japan-Korea Trilateral: Balancing Needs, Priorities, and Cooperation

The US-Japan-Korea trilateral security framework reflects a careful balancing of overlapping yet distinct national interests. For the United States, the trilateral serves as both a force multiplier and a mechanism to maintain regional stability, projecting strategic influence while deterring North Korea and managing China's rise (Rozman, 2015; Nam, 2010). Japan, while aligned with US strategic priorities, is primarily motivated by the need to counter regional security threats, enhance technological and intelligence capabilities, and normalize its role in collective security, all while navigating historical sensitivities with South Korea (Glosserman & Snyder, 2015; Matsuda & Park, 2025). South Korea, on the other hand, views the trilateral as a critical platform to ensure extended deterrence against North Korea, gain operational and intelligence support, and assert its own security autonomy without being subordinated to either Washington

or Tokyo (Lee, 2024; Matsuda & Park, 2025).

These differing priorities shape the dynamics of cooperation. The trilateral is effective when mutual needs converge—such as intelligence-sharing on North Korean missile tests or coordinated diplomatic signaling—but it is often constrained by bilateral frictions, domestic political pressures, and historical grievances. For example, historical disputes between Japan and South Korea can stall operational integration even when US interests favor seamless collaboration (Glosserman & Snyder, 2015). At the same time, the literature highlights nuanced achievements: Japan contributes technological and logistical capacity, South Korea provides localized operational expertise, and the US integrates both into a strategic deterrence umbrella, creating a division of labor that leverages each member's strengths while mitigating weaknesses (Matsuda & Park, 2025).

Although South Korea and Japan are close neighbors with deep historical ties, advanced industrial economies, and strong maritime connections, the amount of trade they conduct directly with each other is surprisingly low. In fact, less than a quarter of their total trade is exchanged within the region¹. This is unexpected—almost paradoxical—because one might assume that such proximity and economic compatibility would naturally lead to robust regional trade. Meanwhile, the United States, ever the gravitational center of global demand, draws in exports from both nations with a magnetic pull that eclipses their mutual exchange. In contrast, the European Union, a paragon of regional integration, conducts nearly 68% of its trade within its own borders—a symphony of solidarity that Northeast Asia has yet to compose.² When the market shares of the EU and the US are combined, they still struggle to match the sheer scale of China's trade footprint, which now stretches across continents with a dragon's reach. China's trade with its neighbors alone—Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong—surpasses \$1.5 trillion annually, a staggering testament to its regional dominance. The paradox is palpable: while the West boasts institutional depth, China commands transactional breadth. The US and EU may wield normative influence, but China's market momentum marches with mercantile might. Thus, Northeast Asia stands at a crossroads—rich in potential, yet restrained by rivalry—where proximity has not yet birthed partnership, and trade flows defy geographic logic. Let us, therefore, reason together.

In conclusion, the trilateral is best understood not as a

¹ <https://www.mckinsey.com/mgi/our-research/geopolitics-and-the-geometry-of-global-trade-2025-update>

² https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdstat47_FS02_en.pdf

monolithic alliance but as a **negotiated, contingent security network**, in which overlapping yet sometimes divergent objectives are harmonized through careful diplomacy, shared threat perception, and strategic necessity. Its fragility is inseparable from its potential: the very differences that complicate cooperation also compel innovation, dialogue, and flexibility. In the complex architecture of East Asian security, the US–Japan–Korea trilateral stands as both a mirror of historical legacies and a canvas for future possibilities—a testament to the art of aligning interests without erasing individuality, and to the enduring challenge of transforming strategic convergence into durable regional order.

Two quotations serve to highlight to conundrum: “The United States has consistently sought to align its two key alliances in Northeast Asia into a coherent strategic framework, particularly in moments of heightened regional uncertainty”, by the US sociologist Gilbert Rozman.

And on y Korean Minister for Unification: “North and South Korea joined the United Nations at the same time and have been treated as two states under international law and international politics — and they still are. We must focus change on eliminating hostility”.

Minister Chung’s statement reads like a careful compass, grounded in the currents of reality, pointing toward the calm waters of reduced hostility between the two Koreas. Across the Pacific, Rozman’s observation casts the United States as the cartographer of a broader map, seeking to weave its alliances in Northeast Asia into a single, coherent tapestry amid turbulent regional seas. Set against each other, these perspectives illuminate the delicate balancing act within the trilateral: South Korea navigating the narrow straits of inter-Korean reconciliation, while the United States charts a course through the expansive ocean of regional security architecture. And though the path is far from free of storms, it is by no means devoid of hope.

Avanti K-Pop

If these historical dynamics are the starting point, how should the United States approach the DPRK now, and what might be achieved under the current administration? Any operative U.S. strategy should be guided by three interlocking objectives: (1) reduce the risk of nuclear or conventional conflict; (2) preserve and strengthen extended deterrence and alliance assurance; and (3) create calibrated, reversible incentives that can induce Pyongyang to accept incremental constraints on its strategic program in exchange for verifiable relief and security guarantees.

First, risk reduction must be the immediate priority. Practically, this means restoring and institutionalizing crisis-

communication channels, seeking negotiated moratoria on certain classes of provocative testing (for example, long-range ICBM tests or nuclear tests) in return for discrete sanctions relief, and expanding transparency measures that reduce the likelihood of miscalculation during crises. These steps are modest relative to the maximalist demands of total denuclearization, but they are feasible, mutually beneficial, and directly responsive to the most acute dangers facing the peninsula.

Second, alliance cohesion and deterrence posture must be maintained and visibly reinforced. The United States should continue to demonstrate credible conventional and nuclear deterrent capabilities with South Korea and Japan while being judicious about exercising those capabilities in ways that Pyongyang can construe as escalatory. The dual track of deterrence and diplomacy—affirming the credibility of allied defense while pursuing parallel diplomatic and economic instruments—remains the single best hedge against both collapse into war and diplomatic irrelevance.

Third, diplomacy should be calibrated, phased, and verifiable. The summit diplomacy of 2018–2019 exposed two structural weaknesses: the absence of a durable, staged framework linking concessions and counter-concessions, and inadequate advance agreement on verification. A more actionable template would sequence measures that are technically verifiable and politically legible for all parties: for example, an initial phase focused on a verifiable freeze of certain fissile-material production activities and a halt to long-range testing, paired with targeted humanitarian and economic measures; a middle phase involving reciprocal inspections and limited sanctions relief tied to demonstrable and irreversible actions on specific facilities; and a long-term phase in which broader normalization is conditioned on the progressive roll-back and irreversible dismantlement of declared strategic assets. Each stage must contain clear verification protocols, third-party monitoring where practicable, and contingencies that allow a return to more coercive measures if commitments are violated.

Why did the Trump–Kim process ultimately become stranded, and what lessons should inform current practice? First, summitry substituted for the patient bureaucratic preparation required to translate high-level momentum into implementable technical and legal instruments; negotiators lacked mutually accepted benchmarks and robust verification mechanisms. Second, both sides entered talks with asymmetric end goals and domestic constraints that were poorly reconciled: the DPRK sought rapid sanctions relief and security guarantees that would shore up regime survival, while the U.S. domestic political environment and alliance politics constrained the administration’s ability to offer

meaningful, irreversible concessions without verifiable reciprocation. Third, external actors—especially China and, to a lesser extent, Russia—retain structural leverage over the DPRK and therefore any durable settlement will require their cooperative engagement in enforcement and inducements. Fourth, Kim may have wanted to prevent Trump from losing face, a paramount concern in Asia, even among revolutionary parvenus. These factors combined to produce a classic principal-agent mismatch: dramatic political theater at the top, but insufficient technical groundwork and alliance coordination at the negotiating table.

Given these constraints, what is credibly attainable under the current administration? A realistic short-to-medium term agenda would prioritize the following measurable outcomes: (1) restoration of sustained diplomatic engagement—even at lower levels—with mechanisms for regular dialogue; (2) negotiated, verifiable freezes on the most destabilizing activities (notably nuclear tests and ICBM launches) in exchange for calibrated, reversible sanctions relief; (3) expansion of humanitarian assistance and people-to-people exchanges that are depoliticized and transparent to reduce popular suffering while limiting diversion risks; and (4) the construction of a multilateral risk-management architecture that includes China, Russia, and the Republic of Korea as active participants in enforcement and incentive structures. Collectively, these measures would neither produce immediate denuclearization nor a comprehensive peace treaty in the short run, but they would materially reduce the risk of catastrophic escalation, preserve policy space for longer-term arms-control negotiations, and create a sequence of verifiable bargains that can be built upon.

Finally, policymakers must accept the normative and political discomfort of a portfolio approach that tolerates an imperfect status quo while systematically reducing its risks. For Washington, this means resisting the binary framing—engage unconditionally or coerce to collapse—that has paralysed policy at several historical inflection points. Instead, an approach anchored in stabilization, calibrated incentives, allied cohesion, and rigorous verification offers the least bad path forward: it reduces immediate dangers, preserves deterrence, and creates the institutional and political prerequisites for any more ambitious settlement that might become possible in the longer term.

Despite shared ancestry, language, and cultural heritage, the political positions of North and South Korea have hardened across decades in ways that now appear deeply entrenched. The roots of this divergence lie in the structural and ideological choices imposed at the close of the Second World War, the devastation of the Korean War, and the reinforcing logics of regime survival and alliance politics. Following the hurried division of the peninsula in 1945, the North institutionalized a highly centralized socialist system aligned

with the Soviet Union, while the South gradually, and often unevenly, consolidated its identity under an anti-communist, U.S.-backed framework that later evolved into liberal democracy. These divergent trajectories were cemented by the trauma of the Korean War, which left millions dead, permanently divided families, and an armistice rather than a peace treaty. For Pyongyang, the war validated a politics of insecurity and justified an entrenched security state; for Seoul, it reinforced the imperative of alliance with the United States and nurtured suspicion toward compromise with the North. Over time, the absence of sustained reconciliation produced generational socialization into separate political realities, such that younger Koreans today often perceive one another less as compatriots separated by circumstance than as members of distinct national communities. This process of estrangement has been reinforced by external powers: U.S. security guarantees have sustained South Korea's prosperity and democracy, while Chinese and Soviet support ensured the survival of the Kim regime. In this sense, the peninsula's hardened positions are not merely the product of domestic ideology but also the reflection of international rivalry projected onto a divided land.

Against this backdrop, alternative instruments of engagement acquire heightened importance. Track II diplomacy, by creating unofficial and depoliticized channels of dialogue, offers a way to mitigate hardened official stances and explore areas of potential flexibility. Non-official exchanges among academics, humanitarian actors, and technical experts can generate reservoirs of trust and understanding that survive when Track I diplomacy collapses. In particular, humanitarian cooperation and scientific dialogue create opportunities to re-humanize relations, to remind both sides of shared cultural and social affinities, and to gradually chip away at the rigid narratives that have been institutionalized since 1945. By working outside of official structures, Track II processes can provide continuity across administrations and political cycles, creating a scaffolding of communication that formal negotiations may later build upon.

Equally important is the cultivation of emotional intelligence in statecraft. The dynamics of Korean diplomacy demonstrate that questions of legitimacy, status, and respect weigh heavily on the DPRK's strategic calculus. The regime's acute sensitivity to recognition and face means that the symbolic and affective dimensions of diplomacy cannot be separated from substantive negotiations. The failure of previous engagements has often turned less on technical disagreements than on perceived humiliation or the failure to provide gestures of respect. A diplomatic style attentive to the psychology of

the North Korean leadership—without sacrificing strategic clarity—can minimize breakdowns born of symbolic missteps and create a climate more conducive to reciprocity.

In this context, the question of U.S. recognition of North Korea illustrates both the risks and the potential of calibrated engagement. Formal recognition would address Pyongyang's enduring demand for legitimacy, thereby removing one of the regime's justifications for nuclear entrenchment, and it could institutionalize permanent communication channels that reduce the danger of miscalculation. Yet recognition, if extended prematurely, could undermine allied cohesion and reward intransigence. The challenge for U.S. policy lies in sequencing: recognition must be embedded within a phased diplomatic process linked to verifiable constraints on the DPRK's strategic programs. As part of such a framework, recognition could function not as an unconditional concession but as a powerful incentive for incremental compliance, simultaneously addressing Pyongyang's psychological insecurities while upholding Washington's commitment to verifiable, reciprocal progress.

Taken together, these approaches—recognizing the structural reasons for hardened positions, leveraging Track II diplomacy to sustain communication, applying emotional intelligence to reduce symbolic friction, and considering recognition as a carefully sequenced tool—offer a path toward mitigating risk and reshaping the conditions under which longer-term reconciliation might become possible. They do not erase the deep historical and ideological divides that have grown since 1945, but they provide a repertoire of strategies capable of easing tensions, humanizing dialogue, and sustaining incremental progress in one of the most enduring conflicts of the modern international order.

Korean Mentality as a peace resource

Korean culture is shaped by a rich tapestry of historical, philosophical, and social influences that have cultivated a distinctive national mentality and a nuanced approach to peace within society.

Korea's cultural foundation is deeply rooted in **Confucianism**, which emphasizes hierarchy, respect for elders, filial piety, and social harmony. These values permeate interpersonal relationships, education, and governance. The concept of *jeong*—a uniquely Korean emotional bond that blends affection, loyalty, and empathy—plays a central role in social cohesion. It fosters a sense of collective responsibility and mutual care, even in highly competitive environments.

The Korean mentality is often described as resilient and adaptive. Centuries of foreign invasions, colonization, and war have instilled a strong sense of national identity and perseverance. This is reflected in the cultural emphasis on

han, a complex emotional state that combines sorrow, endurance, and hope. *Han* is not passive; it often fuels creativity, activism, and a drive for justice and reconciliation.

The South Korean Ministry of Unification focused in 2025 on restoring inter-Korean communication, resuming dialogue, updating its unification vision based on liberal while involving the public more deeply in policy directions, democratic principles, and expanding reconciliation initiatives—even as North Korea has hardened its stance against unification and bilateral cooperation³. There is an Inter-Korean cooperation fund greased with 1 trillion won aiming at reviving exchanges, dialogue and mutually beneficial projects. South Korea is also advancing international dialogue on unification, engaging with partners such as the US, Japan and the European Union, and positioning regional peace initiatives – including environmental cooperation as part of its broader strategy. We know from publishing a draft peace treaty on our former blog that North Korea is interested in diplomatic overtures and considers a peace treaty a framework that is relevant to discuss, albeit they wanted security and defence matters to be held outside the sectoral and issue-specific discussions inducted by the bilateral peace treaty or a subsequent treaty of cooperation and friendship. Both the US and South Korea have unrealistic expectations about what can be achieved, and will continue to bask in ignorance in the absence of mutual recognition and political dialogue. Even so, there is an opening and increased recognition in Seoul international cooperation is needed to unblock the dossier. Our educated guess it is not impossible to get Pyongyang back into the NPT in return for modernization of its armed forces and/or other concessions in the context of détente on the Korean peninsula.

In terms of peace within society, Korea balances rapid modernization with deep-rooted traditions. Social order is maintained through a combination of legal frameworks and informal norms. Education is highly valued, not only as a path to personal success but also as a means of contributing to national development. However, the intense pressure associated with academic and professional achievement has led to growing conversations around mental health and social well-being. Community life is vibrant, with strong neighborhood networks, religious institutions, and civic organizations playing key roles in conflict resolution and social support. In South Korea, democratic institutions and civil society have matured significantly since the 1980s, contributing to peaceful protest movements and policy reforms. The candlelight vigils of 2016–2017, which led to the

³ www.unikorea.go.kr/eng_unikorea

impeachment of a sitting president, are often cited as a model of peaceful civic engagement.

In North Korea, peace is framed differently—more as state-imposed stability than participatory harmony. The regime emphasizes ideological unity and loyalty, with limited space for dissent or pluralism. Nonetheless, even within this context, traditional values and kinship networks continue to shape everyday life.

Across the peninsula, Korean culture reflects a deep yearning for reconciliation and unity. The division between North and South remains a profound national trauma, yet cultural exchanges, family reunions, and shared heritage continue to nurture hope for peaceful coexistence.

Korean society also places a high value on collective memory and historical continuity. The legacy of colonization and division has shaped a strong cultural emphasis on justice, remembrance, and national dignity. This is evident in public rituals, memorials, and education that reinforce a shared sense of identity and resilience.

The image showcases traditional Korean hanbok attire, reflecting the cultural emphasis on elegance, symbolism, and ceremonial identity. The vibrant red and gold patterns signify status and festivity, often worn during weddings or official rituals. The multicolored cloth suggests a connection to ancestral traditions and seasonal celebrations. The layering and structure of the hanbok highlight Confucian values of modesty and decorum. The presence of two individuals, each in distinct styles, illustrates gendered and generational variations in Korean dress. Their poised demeanor conveys reverence for heritage and social harmony. Such attire is not merely aesthetic but embodies historical continuity and collective memory. Overall, the image serves as a visual narrative of Korea's cultural pride and peaceful social values.

Korean cultural values are deeply embedded in the nation's historical, philosophical, and social fabric, shaping both individual behavior and collective identity. Central to this cultural framework is the concept of *jeong*, a uniquely Korean emotional bond that encompasses empathy, loyalty, and affection. This sentiment fosters strong interpersonal relationships and contributes to social cohesion, particularly in times of adversity. Complementing this is the principle of *inhwa*, which emphasizes harmony and cooperative interaction. *Inhwa* discourages overt confrontation and promotes consensus-building, making it a foundational element in conflict resolution and civic engagement.

The emotional depth of Korean society is further reflected in the notion of *han*, a complex feeling of sorrow, endurance, and hope that has evolved from historical experiences of colonization, war, and division. Rather than serving as a passive emotion, *han* often inspires creative expression and moral resilience, becoming a source of strength in both personal and national narratives. Filial piety, derived from

Confucian traditions, reinforces respect for elders and ancestral heritage, shaping family structures and societal expectations.



Source:

<https://www.koreanculture.org/korea-information-life>

Community solidarity remains a vital aspect of Korean life, with neighborhood networks, religious institutions, and civic organizations playing key roles in maintaining social order and providing support. Education is highly esteemed, not only as a means of personal advancement but also as a vehicle for national development and ethical cultivation. The cultural emphasis on modesty and decorum further reinforces respectful behavior and social discipline, contributing to a stable and orderly society.

Korea's collective identity is sustained through a shared historical consciousness and national pride, which inform public rituals, memorials, and educational curricula. Spiritual pluralism, encompassing Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, and indigenous shamanistic practices, enriches the moral landscape and promotes values such as compassion, community service, and spiritual healing. These traditions support peaceful coexistence and offer diverse pathways for personal and communal well-being. Peaceful civic engagement is a hallmark of contemporary Korean society, exemplified by nonviolent protest movements and democratic participation. The candlelight vigils of 2016–2017, which led to significant political reform, illustrate the capacity for collective action grounded in cultural values of harmony and justice.

Harnessing these values for broader societal benefit involves integrating them into policy design, educational reform, urban planning, and digital platforms. By embedding principles such as jeong and inhwa into governance and public discourse, Korea can continue to cultivate a resilient and peace-oriented society that serves as a model for inclusive development and intercultural dialogue.

The concept of *inhwa*, or harmony, guides social interactions and conflict resolution. It encourages compromise, indirect communication, and the avoidance of open confrontation, especially in hierarchical settings. This cultural tendency supports peaceful coexistence but can also mask underlying tensions.

Religious and philosophical pluralism—ranging from Buddhism and Christianity to shamanistic traditions—contributes to Korea's rich moral landscape. These belief systems often promote compassion, community service, and spiritual healing, reinforcing peaceful values.

Art, music, and literature serve as powerful vehicles for expressing collective emotions and aspirations for peace. From traditional pansori performances to contemporary K-pop ballads, cultural production often reflects themes of longing, unity, and hope.

Finally, Korea's global engagement—through diplomacy, humanitarian aid, and cultural exchange—demonstrates a commitment to peace beyond its borders. The Korean experience offers valuable insights into how cultural depth, historical consciousness, and civic participation can shape a resilient and peace-oriented society.

Perhaps then, we should be looking into establishing a link between Japan and Korea.

Case-Study 1: South Korea-Japan Link-up

The relationship between Japan and Korea has been marked by a complex history of cultural exchange, conflict, and colonization. From the 16th century, Japan and Korea engaged in limited trade and cultural interactions. However, the modern era introduced significant challenges. The most profound impact was Japan's colonization of Korea from 1910 to 1945, during which Koreans faced political oppression, forced labor, and cultural assimilation policies. This period left a deep legacy of resentment and historical grievances, which continue to influence bilateral relations today.

Following World War II and the division of the Korean Peninsula, Japan and South Korea normalized diplomatic relations in 1965 with the signing of the Treaty on Basic Relations. While this established official ties, disputes over

historical issues, such as wartime forced labor, "comfort women," and territorial claims over the Dokdo/Takeshima islets, have periodically strained relations. Despite these tensions, both countries have maintained extensive economic, cultural, and security ties, including trade partnerships and collaboration within multilateral frameworks such as the United Nations and the Greater Tumen Initiative.

Understanding this historical context is crucial for evaluating the feasibility and potential impact of joint infrastructure projects, such as the proposed hyper-tube rail link, which could serve as a tool for reconciliation and regional integration.

The proposed hyper-tube rail link between Kyūshū, Japan, and Busan, South Korea, envisions a high-speed undersea transportation system aimed at enhancing regional connectivity, promoting economic integration, and serving as a catalyst for peacebuilding in Northeast Asia. This initiative aligns with broader efforts to foster cooperation and stability in a region characterized by historical tensions and complex geopolitical dynamics.⁴

Estimating the financial viability of such a large-scale infrastructure project requires careful consideration of construction costs, potential economic benefits, and funding mechanisms. Previous proposals for undersea tunnels between Japan and South Korea have faced challenges related to high costs and economic feasibility. For instance, a 2007 report estimated the cost of a tunnel project at between ₩60 and ₩100 trillion, with construction taking 15 to 20 years (Wikipedia, 2025). Similarly, a 2009 joint study identified construction costs of approximately ¥10 trillion by Japanese estimates and nearly ₩200 trillion by Korean estimates, with low benefit-to-cost ratios.

However, proponents argue that such projects can yield significant economic benefits, including job creation and industrial stimulation. A 2009 report suggested that the tunnel could contribute ₩13 trillion to South Korea's construction industry and ₩18 trillion to Japan's, with broader economic benefits estimated at ₩54 trillion for Korea and ₩88 trillion for Japan⁵.

The technological feasibility of constructing a hyper-tube rail system is contingent upon advancements in several key areas, including vacuum technology, magnetic levitation systems, and tunnel construction techniques. While the concept of hyperloop transportation has garnered significant attention, commercial implementation remains distant. A 2020 report indicated

⁴*Futuring peace in Northeast Asia.*
https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/project_brief_-_future_of_regional_narrative_building_in_northeast_asia-2022.pdf

⁵ Wikipedia. (2025, September 21). *Japan–Korea undersea tunnel.*
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan%E2%80%93Korea_Undersea_Tunnel

that commercial hyperloop systems are still at least 20 years away from realization, with the first passenger-carrying high-speed systems not expected to commence operations until at least 2040 (Axios, 2020).

Recent developments, such as the successful test run of a passenger pod in vacuum conditions in Europe in 2023, demonstrate progress in the field (Innovation Origins, 2023). However, substantial technological and regulatory challenges remain before such systems can be deployed on a transnational scale.

The successful implementation of a hyper-tube rail link between Japan and South Korea would require robust governance structures and political cooperation. The project would necessitate the establishment of joint oversight committees, transparent decision-making processes, and shared responsibility for construction, operation, and maintenance.

Political conditions in Northeast Asia present both opportunities and challenges. Initiatives like the United Nations' "Futuring Peace in Northeast Asia" project emphasize the importance of regional cooperation and dialogue (United Nations, 2022). Additionally, the Greater Tumen Initiative, involving China, Russia, Mongolia, and South Korea, serves as a multilateral framework for economic development in the region (Wikipedia, 2025). Historical tensions between Japan and South Korea, however, could complicate negotiations and implementation (South China Morning Post, 2022).

Beyond its economic and technological aspects, the proposed hyper-tube rail link has the potential to serve as a significant peacebuilding initiative in Northeast Asia. By fostering economic interdependence, facilitating people-to-people exchanges, and establishing joint governance frameworks, the project could contribute to building trust and reducing historical tensions between Japan and South Korea.

Furthermore, the project aligns with broader regional peacebuilding efforts. The United Nations' Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs advocates for expanded coordination and collaboration among Northeast Asian countries to manage and resolve differences peacefully. The United Nations' *Futuring Peace in Northeast Asia* initiative, launched in 2021 by the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), aims to foster regional peace by amplifying the voices of youth and integrating strategic foresight into policymaking. The initiative emphasizes the importance of youth participation in shaping the future of peace and security in the region.

A key component of the initiative is the development of regional narratives that promote peace, inclusivity, and cooperation. By engaging young peacebuilders from countries such as Japan, the Republic of Korea, China, and Mongolia, the

project facilitates the creation of policy recommendations that reflect diverse perspectives and innovative solutions. These recommendations are shared with policymakers to inform and influence high-level discussions and decisions. The initiative also incorporates strategic foresight methodologies, enabling participants to anticipate future challenges and opportunities in the region. This approach helps in crafting proactive strategies that address emerging issues and contribute to long-term stability and peace.

Through these efforts, the *Futuring Peace in Northeast Asia* initiative seeks to build a foundation for sustainable peace by empowering the next generation of leaders and ensuring that their insights and ideas are integral to the peacebuilding process.⁶

The Greater Tumen Initiative, a dormant yet promising vessel of regional cooperation, can be reignited through renewed commitment and visionary engagement. Member states must rekindle ties with North Korea and invite Japan to bring both balance and dynamism to the collective endeavor. Existing partnerships with China, Mongolia, Russia, and South Korea should be deepened, aligning GTI projects with national ambitions to transform shared landscapes into corridors of prosperity. By weaving GTI initiatives into the fabric of the Belt and Road and ASEAN frameworks, the initiative can bridge Northeast and Southeast Asia with threads of commerce and connectivity. The United Nations, as a guardian of norms and sustainable development, offers a beacon for technical support and capacity building. Sectoral revitalization—spanning tourism, transport, energy, agriculture, and environmental stewardship—can convert abstract cooperation into tangible benefits felt by everyday citizens. Establishing a permanent secretariat and a dedicated regional development fund will transform ambition into action, anchoring institutional memory and financial resilience. Robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms act as the compass and sextant, ensuring accountability while charting progress through uncertain waters. People-to-people exchanges, from academic scholarships to cultural festivals, will sow seeds of understanding and empathy across borders. In embracing both structure and spirit, the GTI can rise from dormancy as a living testament to shared vision, turning geographic proximity into a symphony of regional solidarity.

The proposed hyper-tube rail connection between Japan and South Korea represents a transformative vision for regional integration and peacebuilding in Northeast Asia. While challenges exist in terms of financial viability, technological readiness, and political cooperation, the

⁶ United Nations. (2022). *Futuring peace in Northeast Asia*. https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/project_brief_-

[future_of_regional_narrative_building_in_northeast_asia-2022.pdf](https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/project_brief_-)

potential economic, diplomatic, and symbolic benefits are significant. A phased approach, beginning with feasibility studies and pilot projects, could provide the foundation for realizing this high-impact infrastructure initiative, reinforcing peace and collaboration in a historically complex regional context.

Russia and China in Northeast Asia

China has historically been North Korea's indispensable partner, providing the bulk of its trade and energy supplies while leveraging this dependency to preserve stability on its border. Russia, after the end of the Cold War, played a secondary role, often offering diplomatic cover but little tangible economic or security support. In the past two years, however, this balance has shifted. Moscow, facing isolation from the West, has expanded its outreach to Pyongyang. Reports of arms transfers, labor agreements, and discussions of security partnerships highlight a Russia that seeks to use North Korea both as a supplier of military material and as a symbol of solidarity against U.S. alliances. For Pyongyang, this new partnership offers diversification of patronage, reducing dependence on Beijing.

For the conduct of its relationship with Russia, China procures energy, weapon and trade with Russia, but do not want to put all its eggs in one basket. It will likely leverage its investments in Eastern Siberia towards influence over the energy market and leverage over Russia in North East Asia, including on the Korean peninsula.

Despite this, China remains the stronger actor. Its economic leverage is unmatched, and it possesses unique influence in calibrating both punishment and relief for Pyongyang. While Moscow can provide weapons, energy, and political symbolism, Beijing can offer sustained survival mechanisms. In this sense, China and Russia are drawn together by shared opposition to U.S. military presence and trilateral cooperation among Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo, yet they are quietly in competition for North Korea's favor. This competition will not necessarily destabilize the region in itself, but it risks undermining coordinated diplomatic efforts if Beijing and Moscow pursue divergent bargains with Pyongyang. The long-term trajectory is therefore one of tactical convergence against U.S. influence but strategic rivalry for North Korea's loyalty.

Certainly, the US Intelligence's perception that China will want to disarm North Korea from a position of strength provides an additional strategic motivation to shape the environment and to explore what could be achieved on the Korean peninsula in the coming years to ensure no war breaks out and to keep the diplomatic channels open between the involved parties. We should not expect the US to accept spilled blood of our

forefathers to have been in vain – nobody would find such surrender honourable.

After all, both China and Russia assisted North Korea in developing its nuclear program, but for different reasons. Russia to stay in the game in North East Asia and China in order to change the game and define new rules. Indeed, there is a need for a different game plan.

Enter also the evolution in the Sino-Russian relationship in Eastern Siberia. China's core interests and objectives in Eastern Siberia focus on securing long-term access to critical resources, expanding influence and enhancing energy security. These priorities reflect economic, demographic, and geopolitical considerations central to Beijing's strategy. The domestic energy resources of China is dwindling, so they need alternative supplies to support its energy hungry economy. Eastern Siberia allows diversification to reduce reliance on maritime chokepoints and boost resilience against supply disruption. By leveraging the power of Siberia gas and oil pipelines it can deepen economic ties and obtain Russian gas at preferential rates, so long as sanctions applies. Gaining land or market access for Chinese companies and labor, especially in the sparsely populated Russian Far East regions. Nationalist circles have started asserting historical claims and fostering demographic presence sometimes referencing 19th century territorial losses. China can expand geopolitical influence as Russia's focus weakens elsewhere and Western sanctions deepen Moscow's dependence on China. Negotiating favorable investment terms and infrastructure projects, while resisting entangling economic commitments. It can enhance strategic depth by cultivating political and military leverage in the region. Minimizing risk from Western scrutiny, as Siberia offers strategic gains without the overt conflict risk of a Taiwan scenario. It can use access to Siberia as bargaining leverage in broader Eurasian integration projects and global diplomacy, for instance by working around the situation on the Korean peninsula similar to the East Asian Trilateral towards solution of the conflict.

Given the manner in which the power vacuum on the Korean peninsula was filled after the fall of Japan in 1945 and the role of Russia in the development of the North Korean nuclear program, balanced by the Thorium deposits in China to replace coal, the wiser course of action would seem to be to address in a more sustained manner the development needs of Eastern Siberia in relation to demographics, economic development, security and infrastructural development, something that requires economic diversification, internal development, transport, logistics, and investments in digital technologies.

Case-Study 2: Eastern Siberia

Siberia, a vast and resource-rich region within the Russian Federation, presents a complex landscape of demographic, economic, security, and infrastructural challenges that necessitate a strategic approach to internal development and diversification. Eastern Siberia constitutes a strategically significant macro-region within the Russian Federation, characterized by a resource-intensive economic structure and a complex interplay of extractive industries, energy production, and transboundary trade. Encompassing administrative territories such as Krasnoyarsk Krai, Irkutsk Oblast, the Republics of Buryatia, Khakassia, Tuva, and Zabaikalsky Krai, the region is endowed with substantial deposits of coal, gold, iron ore, graphite, zinc, and bauxite. These mineral resources underpin the region's export-oriented industrial base, with a pronounced emphasis on raw and semi-processed commodities destined for Asian markets, particularly China.

Industrial activity in Eastern Siberia exhibits spatial asymmetry, with Krasnoyarsk Krai and Irkutsk Oblast demonstrating relatively diversified manufacturing capacities, including mechanical engineering and metallurgy, while peripheral areas remain predominantly extractive. The region's energy infrastructure is anchored by major hydroelectric facilities—most notably the Bratsk, Krasnoyarsk, and Irkutsk dams—which harness the hydrological potential of the Angara and Yenisei rivers to support both regional consumption and national grid integration.

Eastern Siberia's foreign economic relations are marked by a structural imbalance: exports are dominated by low value-added goods, whereas imports consist largely of high-technology equipment and industrial inputs. Chinese investment has become increasingly salient, particularly in Zabaikalsky Krai, where cross-border economic cooperation is expanding across multiple sectors. Despite its sparse population and severe climatic conditions, Eastern Siberia plays a pivotal role in Russia's Asia-Pacific strategy, functioning as both a resource corridor and a geopolitical buffer. Its development trajectory is closely tied to infrastructural megaprojects such as the Trans-Siberian Railway and the Northern Sea Route, which aim to enhance connectivity, facilitate trade, and consolidate Russia's presence in the broader Eurasian space.

The demographic profile of Siberia is characterized by low population density and a declining population trend, exacerbated by persistent out-migration. This demographic contraction is particularly acute among younger and skilled cohorts, who are drawn to more economically vibrant regions. Urban centers such as Novosibirsk and Krasnoyarsk serve as focal points of population concentration, yet they coexist with extensive rural areas that suffer from limited access to essential services and infrastructure⁷. These disparities

contribute to a regional human development index that consistently falls below the national average, reflecting systemic inequalities in health, education, and income. Economically, Siberia has long functioned as a frontier for resource extraction, with its development model heavily reliant on hydrocarbons, timber, and mineral exports. This dependence on primary commodities renders the region vulnerable to global market fluctuations and inhibits the growth of diversified industrial sectors. Efforts to stimulate economic diversification have included the establishment of special economic zones, particularly in Irkutsk and Krasnoyarsk, which aim to attract investment and foster innovation through fiscal incentives and regulatory flexibility. However, the success of these initiatives remains contingent upon broader structural reforms and sustained investment in human capital and technological infrastructure. The integration of digital technologies into industrial processes, governance, and service delivery is increasingly recognized as a critical component of Siberia's modernization strategy.

From a security perspective, Siberia occupies a strategic position within Russia's national defense architecture. Historically, the region has hosted key military-industrial complexes and continues to play a role in logistical planning and defense-related production. Its geographic proximity to China, Mongolia, and Kazakhstan further enhances its significance as a geopolitical buffer and a potential corridor for Eurasian connectivity. The securitization of Siberian development is evident in proposals for new urban settlements designed to support military logistics and population retention in border areas. Infrastructure remains both a constraint and an opportunity for Siberia's development. The region's vast distances and challenging terrain complicate the delivery of transport and communication services. The Trans-Siberian Railway and the Baikal-Amur Mainline constitute critical transport arteries, yet both require substantial modernization to meet contemporary demands for freight and passenger mobility. In parallel, the expansion of digital infrastructure, including broadband access and smart logistics systems, is essential for enhancing regional competitiveness and enabling remote service provision. Urban development initiatives, including the construction of new cities and the revitalization of existing ones, aim to improve living standards and attract skilled labor, although implementation has been uneven and often hampered by bureaucratic inertia.

Addressing Siberia's multifaceted challenges requires a comprehensive and integrated policy framework. Economic diversification must prioritize the development

⁷<https://helda.helsinki.fi/server/api/core/bitstreams/f6f475fc-729f-41cc-8f67-581f3496ad63/content>

of high-value sectors such as renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, and agro-industrial complexes. Investments in education, healthcare, and housing are necessary to reverse demographic decline and build a resilient labor force. Coordinated planning across federal, regional, and private sectors is essential to ensure the coherence and sustainability of development efforts. Moreover, the strategic deployment of digital technologies offers the potential for leapfrogging traditional development constraints and fostering inclusive growth. Siberia's transformation is not merely a regional concern but a national imperative, with implications for Russia's economic resilience, geopolitical posture, and social cohesion.

A Development Strategy for Siberia is moving up the political agenda in Russia with priorities and actions that need to be implemented.⁸ Siberia's development is being framed as a transformative megaproject for the twenty-first century, with a strategic horizon extending to 2035. This initiative is positioned as a national priority, particularly in response to shifting geopolitical conditions and the imperative for internal economic resilience. The strategy emphasizes the mobilization of diverse resources and calls for a phased implementation plan that reflects regional specificities and long-term growth potential.

The planning process has involved collaboration among federal authorities, regional governments, and expert communities. A novel approach to territorial development is being introduced, organizing economic activities into major clusters supported by targeted investment projects. This marks a departure from fragmented regional policies toward a more structured and goal-oriented framework. The Russian government has endorsed the strategy and intends to adopt a detailed implementation roadmap within the current year.

Demographic challenges are central to the strategy's rationale. Siberia faces significant population decline and labor shortages, driven by harsh climatic conditions, underdeveloped infrastructure, and limited economic opportunities. The quality of urban environments remains below the national average, contributing to out-migration and deterring inward investment.

Industrial development is being reimagined to retain added value within the region. Companies such as RUSAL are expanding their capabilities in end-product manufacturing and forging partnerships with scientific and educational institutions. These efforts aim to build a self-sustaining industrial ecosystem that supports broader improvements in housing, healthcare, and recreational infrastructure.

Implementation priorities include investment in transport and logistics to enhance connectivity, development of urban centers to improve living standards, and promotion of digital

technologies to modernize governance and industry. Strengthening regional institutions is also emphasized as a means to coordinate development efforts and attract private capital.

By 2035, the strategy envisions Siberia as a dynamic contributor to the national economy, characterized by modern infrastructure, diversified industries, and revitalized urban environments. The region is expected to serve as a model for territorial development, integrating global best practices with locally adapted solutions. This vision reflects Russia's ambition to transform Siberia from a peripheral resource zone into a central engine of national growth and innovation.

Siberian Indigenous peoples possess profound ecological, spiritual, and cultural wisdom rooted in centuries of coexistence with some of the planet's harshest environments. Their knowledge systems are deeply intertwined with the rhythms of nature, emphasizing balance, reciprocity, and respect for the land. Among groups such as the Evenki, Chukchi, Nenets, and Sakha, traditional practices like reindeer herding, fishing, and seasonal migration are not merely economic activities but expressions of a worldview that sees humans as part of a larger ecological continuum.

This wisdom is reflected in oral traditions, cosmologies, and healing practices that prioritize harmony with natural forces. For example, the Nenets' understanding of tundra ecosystems informs sustainable grazing patterns that preserve fragile landscapes. The Evenki's intimate knowledge of forest cycles and animal behavior has long guided hunting and conservation practices. These insights are increasingly recognized by scientists and policymakers for their relevance to biodiversity preservation and climate adaptation.

Education among Siberian Indigenous communities often blends formal schooling with intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. Elders play a central role in teaching language, rituals, and survival skills, though modern pressures—such as urban migration and standardized curricula—threaten the continuity of these traditions. Efforts to revitalize Indigenous languages and incorporate traditional ecological knowledge into school programs are underway, but face challenges of funding, political will, and cultural recognition.

⁸<https://forumspb.com/en/news/news/novoe-razvitie-sibiri-megaproekt-xxi->

[veka/?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fcopilot.microsoft.com%2F](https://forumspb.com/en/news/news/novoe-razvitie-sibiri-megaproekt-xxi-veka/?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fcopilot.microsoft.com%2F)



Source:

<https://www.sbs.com.au/language/russian/en/article/the-stunning-photos-showcasing-the-indigenous-peoples-of-russias-far-east/2ogulgqs2>

This man From Eastern Siberia wears a richly textured, fur-lined garment that suggests traditional or ceremonial clothing, possibly from a Central Asian or Siberian cultural context. The hood is ornate, decorated with intricate embroidery and patterns, emphasizing craftsmanship and cultural significance. The swirling designs may represent natural elements like wind, rivers, or spiritual forces. These garments are not just for warmth—they carry deep **spiritual and ancestral meaning**. In many Siberian cultures, clothing is a form of storytelling: it reflects lineage, cosmology, and the wearer's role in the community. The craftsmanship also speaks to centuries of tradition passed down through generations. His facial expression is calm and composed, with subtle lines that suggest experience and resilience. There is a quiet intensity in his gaze; his eyes are directly focused on the viewer, creating a sense of connection and presence. His lips are relaxed, neither smiling nor frowning, conveying neutrality and contemplation. The combination of the elaborate clothing and his steady gaze gives him an air of dignity and authority. The overall color palette—earthy tones with deep blues and muted gold—enhances the impression of tradition and rootedness. Overall, the man projects an impression of quiet strength, cultural pride, and introspective wisdom, inviting respect and curiosity from the viewer. He is spiritual, has authority among his people and attached to his ancestral land where he and his forefathers have lived for millennia.

In terms of rights, Siberian Indigenous peoples are officially recognized under Russian law, and some protections exist through federal legislation. However, implementation is uneven, and many communities struggle with limited access to healthcare, education, and political representation. Land

rights remain a contentious issue, particularly in areas targeted for resource extraction or infrastructure development. Despite these challenges, Indigenous organizations and cultural leaders continue to advocate for sovereignty, environmental stewardship, and the preservation of ancestral knowledge.

Siberian Indigenous wisdom offers not only a lens into alternative ways of living but also a vital resource for rethinking development, sustainability, and human-nature relations in the twenty-first century.

Indigenous peoples in Northeast Asia represent a diverse and culturally rich segment of the population, yet they face persistent challenges in terms of recognition, rights, and access to development. While Siberia is home to over 40 officially recognized Indigenous groups—including the Evenki, Yakuts, Chukchi, and Nenets—numbering approximately 250,000 individuals, the broader Northeast Asian region encompasses millions more across China, Mongolia, and parts of the Russian Far East.

In China, the government officially recognizes 55 ethnic minority groups, many of whom identify as Indigenous. These groups collectively number around 114 million people, or approximately 8.5% of the national population. While the state promotes policies aimed at improving education and healthcare for ethnic minorities, disparities remain. For example, while minority groups are exempt from the one-child policy and benefit from targeted educational programs, communities such as the Tibetans and Uyghurs continue to face systemic restrictions on cultural expression and political autonomy.⁹

Mongolia's Indigenous population includes nomadic pastoralists such as the Dukha (Tsaatan) reindeer herders in the north. These communities maintain traditional livelihoods closely tied to the land and seasonal migration. Although Mongolia has made strides in recognizing Indigenous rights through environmental and cultural protections, access to education and healthcare in remote areas remains limited, and economic opportunities are constrained by geographic isolation.

Across Northeast Asia, Indigenous peoples often live in rural or ecologically sensitive areas, relying on subsistence agriculture, herding, fishing, and forest-based economies. Their traditional knowledge systems contribute significantly to biodiversity conservation and climate resilience. However, development policies frequently overlook these contributions, and Indigenous territories are often subject to extractive industries, infrastructure projects, and conservation initiatives that disregard customary land rights.

⁹<https://www.asiancenturyinstitute.com/society/804-asia-s-indigenous-peoples>

Education access varies widely. In Russia and China, Indigenous children in remote regions face barriers due to language, distance, and under-resourced schools. While bilingual education programs exist, they are inconsistently implemented and often prioritize national languages over Indigenous ones. In Mongolia, mobile schooling initiatives have been introduced to reach nomadic populations, but logistical and funding challenges persist.

Legal recognition of Indigenous rights in Northeast Asia is uneven. Russia has ratified international conventions such as ILO Convention No. 169, but implementation is limited. China does not officially use the term “Indigenous peoples,” preferring “ethnic minorities,” which affects the framing of rights and protections. Mongolia has made more explicit commitments to Indigenous rights, but enforcement mechanisms remain weak.

In sum, Indigenous peoples in Northeast Asia constitute a significant demographic and cultural presence, yet they continue to face structural barriers to education, healthcare, land rights, and political representation. Addressing these challenges requires not only policy reform but also inclusive development strategies that respect Indigenous knowledge systems and promote equitable access to resources and opportunities.

A multilateral framework would justify a role for the US notably Alaska which has historical links with Chukotka, Shuka, Inuit, and Yakutia to have a say, something that was at the origin of Abramowich’ bid for the governorship of Chukotka and largely eight years long reign, at which point some moderate progresses were made to meet the development needs in a geographical zone, where Japans co-prosperity zone and China’s ressource interests intersect in an ineffective manner comparable to the potential of this remote region. Thus, an institutionalization of links would also serve to even out the Sino-Russian relationship, and addressing the needs of the Indigenous People, without excluding progress in Korea, even as spill-overs between theaters is forestalled through strengthening of governance and correct interventions to ensure balanced and harmonious development in the lands between the Arctic and North pacific regions (Deog & Young, 2025).

We have all been behaving like the cat walking around the porridge instead of solving the issues. Outstanding is whether China and Russia, having both built up strength in each their way merely wants to proceed to address environmental issues or could be interested in a global approach to the travails of North East Asia. Certainly, Indigenous Peoples are not only stewards of biodiversity and sustainable management but could also enrich citizenship concepts and act as a bridge across the Bering strait.

6.ELEMENTS OF A STABLE ORDER ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA

Northeast Asia remains a region marked by enduring geopolitical tensions, historical grievances, and complex inter-state relationships. Despite economic interdependence and cultural proximity, the region lacks a robust multilateral security framework akin to those found in Europe or Southeast Asia. This paper examines key peace initiatives within Northeast Asia and draws comparative insights from other regions that have successfully navigated similar conflict dynamics.

The Korean Peninsula has been a focal point of regional instability since the armistice of 1953. The inter-Korean summits of 2000, 2007, and 2018 represent significant diplomatic efforts aimed at reconciliation and denuclearization. The 2000 and 2007 summits, led by South Korean Presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun respectively, facilitated economic cooperation and humanitarian exchanges. The 2018 Panmunjom Declaration, signed by President Moon Jae-in and Chairman Kim Jong-un, emphasized mutual commitment to peace and denuclearization. However, these initiatives have been constrained by asymmetrical power dynamics, divergent political ideologies, and the strategic interests of external actors such as the United States and China.

Historical memory continues to shape bilateral relations between Japan and South Korea, particularly regarding Japan’s colonial legacy and wartime conduct. The 2015 agreement on the “comfort women” issue, which included an official apology and financial compensation, marked a diplomatic milestone. Nevertheless, domestic opposition and differing historical narratives have impeded sustained reconciliation, underscoring the challenges of transitional justice in East Asia.

Track II initiatives, such as those facilitated by the Toda Peace Institute, have sought to address identity-based conflicts and promote regional dialogue. These workshops engage scholars, civil society actors, and policymakers from China, Japan, South Korea, and the United States. While these efforts contribute to norm-building and mutual understanding, their impact remains limited without complementary state-level engagement.

The European Union exemplifies successful regional integration following centuries of conflict. The Franco-German rapprochement, institutionalized through the European Coal and Steel Community, laid the foundation for supranational governance and collective security. The EU’s emphasis on economic interdependence, legal harmonization, and historical reconciliation offers a model for Northeast Asia, albeit one requiring significant adaptation given the region’s divergent political systems and security dilemmas.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has cultivated a regional order based on non-interference, consensus-building, and incremental cooperation. Despite internal diversity and historical tensions, ASEAN's diplomatic mechanisms—such as the ASEAN Regional Forum—have facilitated dialogue and conflict management. Northeast Asia could benefit from a similar multilateral platform that respects sovereignty while fostering trust and transparency. The Good Friday Agreement (1998) illustrates the efficacy of inclusive negotiations, international mediation, and recognition of identity-based grievances. The Northern Ireland case underscores the importance of engaging non-state actors, addressing historical narratives, and ensuring external guarantees. These principles are pertinent to Northeast Asia, particularly in the context of Korean Peninsula peacebuilding and Sino-Japanese reconciliation.

Peacebuilding in Northeast Asia necessitates a multifaceted approach that integrates historical reconciliation, institutional innovation, and inclusive diplomacy. Comparative analysis reveals that while regional specificities must be acknowledged, lessons from Europe, Southeast Asia, and Northern Ireland offer valuable frameworks for conflict transformation. Future efforts should prioritize both top-down statecraft and bottom-up societal engagement to cultivate a durable regional peace architecture.

Any viable order on the peninsula must begin by acknowledging the reality of North Korea's nuclear status while not abandoning the aspiration of eventual denuclearization. Stability depends less on sweeping, one-time agreements than on incremental and enforceable arrangements that build confidence over time. At its core, stability requires the transformation of the fragile armistice into a durable peace regime. Such a regime must establish predictable mechanisms for conflict prevention, crisis communication, and dispute resolution. Without these, even minor incidents risk spiraling into larger confrontations.

Arms control, rather than immediate disarmament, offers the most practical entry point. A freeze on long-range missile tests or fissile material production, paired with reciprocal restraint in allied military exercises, could generate the first layer of stability. Verification mechanisms are essential, and they must be politically palatable for Pyongyang while credible to the outside world. This requires creative arrangements, including third-party monitors and phased inspections that expand as trust deepens.

Security guarantees are another cornerstone. North Korea's leadership has consistently signaled that its nuclear arsenal is tied to regime survival. To alter this calculus, credible assurances must come not only from Washington and Seoul but also from Beijing and Moscow. A multilateral guarantee that combines negative security assurances with pathways to diplomatic normalization would help to shift North Korea's perception of existential threat. This in turn must be

accompanied by economic integration. Carefully sequenced sanctions relief, tied to verifiable steps, and linked to international assistance in energy, infrastructure, and health, could create incentives for Pyongyang to cooperate without asking it to leap into irreversible concessions at the outset.

Institutionalization matters as well. Sporadic summits and ad hoc dialogues are insufficient to sustain trust. What is needed is a permanent forum for crisis management and technical cooperation. A regional body dedicated to Korean Peninsula stabilization could oversee humanitarian coordination, monitor compliance with agreements, and facilitate people-to-people exchanges such as family reunions or joint disaster relief. Confidence-building measures in the military sphere, from hotlines to notification regimes, would further embed predictability into relations among all parties.

Experience of KEDO

KEDO was created as a diplomatic and technical mechanism involving the United States, South Korea, Japan, and the EU to manage North Korea's nuclear ambitions. Its approach combined energy assistance with nonproliferation incentives.

KEDO struggled with the complexity of coordinating multiple stakeholders with differing priorities. The EU and Japan prioritized technical and humanitarian aspects, the US focused on security guarantees, and South Korea was balancing inter-Korean diplomacy. Divergent interests often slowed decision-making and undermined the organization's agility.

Delays in construction of light-water reactors, bureaucratic hurdles, and funding uncertainties hampered progress. North Korea's inconsistent compliance and shifting domestic politics also complicated KEDO's operational effectiveness.

KEDO relied primarily on incentives rather than enforcement. While this initially gained North Korea's engagement, it proved vulnerable when trust eroded, as seen in the late 2000s when the DPRK resumed nuclear activities.

The North Korean regime maintained tight control over the process, limiting KEDO's ability to monitor and influence actual outcomes on the ground. This demonstrates the difficulty of implementing technical assistance programs in highly centralized or opaque political systems.

Multilateral initiatives require clear alignment of objectives, especially when bridging security, economic, and humanitarian goals. For EU or US-China engagement, differing regional priorities must be reconciled early to avoid coordination paralysis.

Carrots alone are insufficient when dealing with states that may strategically shift positions. Combining incentives with credible enforcement, monitoring, or verification mechanisms strengthens the likelihood of compliance.

Rigid bureaucracies or slow funding cycles can undermine initiatives. Future EU-US-China frameworks should design flexible mechanisms to respond quickly to changing conditions on the ground.

Initiatives must be adapted to local political and administrative structures. Engaging local stakeholders meaningfully increases transparency and sustainability of outcomes.

KEDO demonstrated the risks of open-ended commitments. For EU or US-China initiatives in contentious regions, contingency plans and well-defined exit strategies reduce reputational and financial exposure.

In his work, Professor Simon Nuttall, who taught me along with Alex Stubb, Valerie Plame, and Valeria Baggiotti and Bettina Kotz at College of Europe in Bruges, emphasizes the complexities of coordinating multilateral initiatives, especially when member states have divergent priorities and interests. This observation is pertinent to KEDO, where the EU's involvement highlighted the challenges of aligning the diverse objectives of its members with those of other stakeholders in the organization.

Furthermore, Nuttall's analysis of the EU's role in international diplomacy underscores the importance of clear communication and consistent policy positions. In the context of KEDO, the EU's ability to present a unified stance was crucial in influencing the organization's direction and ensuring that its contributions were effectively integrated into the broader objectives of nonproliferation and regional stability.

While Nuttall's works do not provide direct commentary on KEDO, his broader analyses offer valuable lessons on the intricacies of multilateral diplomacy and the EU's role in such frameworks.

KEDO's experience highlights the limits of multilateral technical-diplomatic engagement in the absence of aligned interests, credible enforcement, and local integration. For the EU and US-China engagement, these lessons emphasize that diplomatic, economic, and security tools must be tightly coordinated, flexible, and adapted to the political realities of the target state.

Diplomatic Initiatives Beyond the Six Party Talks

The Six Party Talks were hamstrung by the assumption that one comprehensive bargain could be struck and implemented. North Korea's bargaining style, domestic politics in the United States and its allies, and divergent Chinese and Russian interests rendered this impossible. A new approach must

abandon the all-or-nothing mindset in favor of layered, multi-track diplomacy.

At the bilateral level, direct channels between Washington and Pyongyang are indispensable. Even when broader negotiations stall, these channels can manage incidents, deliver humanitarian aid, and keep the possibility of incremental arms control alive. Beyond the bilateral level, a new regional forum is necessary. A Northeast Asia Stabilization Forum, composed of the two Koreas, the United States, China, Russia, and Japan, could serve as a standing body to coordinate humanitarian projects, oversee technical verification units, and discuss security issues without the pressure of reaching a single, comprehensive deal.

Economic initiatives could form the backbone of early progress. A peace-for-development corridor, financed by China, South Korea, Russia, and multilateral development banks, could channel investment into infrastructure and energy projects in exchange for verifiable constraints on specific weapons programs. Such a consortium would need strong compliance rules, but it would provide North Korea with tangible benefits while creating vested interests in maintaining cooperation.

Security guarantees must evolve as well. A compact that includes commitments from all major powers to refrain from aggression and regime-change, accompanied by phased normalization steps from Seoul and Tokyo, would be more credible than bilateral promises alone. Linking these guarantees to automatic economic benefits upon compliance would further incentivize Pyongyang to cooperate. Issue-linkage, rather than grand bargains, should guide negotiations. Specific steps by North Korea should trigger specific, visible rewards, such as energy deliveries, humanitarian aid, or banking access.

Beyond traditional arms control, new areas of cooperation can be leveraged. Joint projects in climate adaptation, fisheries, and public health are politically less sensitive yet build trust and institutional memory. Expanding family reunions and cultural exchanges can reduce hostility at the societal level. Even modest cooperation on disaster relief could create habits of working together that insulate the region against crisis escalation.

To ensure credibility, an international verification and compliance unit should be established, possibly under UN auspices but funded by regional stakeholders. This unit would deploy inspectors, operate monitoring technologies, and manage data sharing. Complementing this, a redesigned sanctions regime with rapid suspension and re-imposition mechanisms would make compliance rewards and violations punishments timely and predictable.

A peace treaty between Russia and Japan—still elusive nearly eight decades after World War II—would require a

delicate synthesis of political compromise, economic incentives, and legal clarity. The unresolved territorial dispute over the Southern Kurils (Northern Territories in Japanese parlance) remains the central obstacle, but broader strategic dynamics, including Russia's posture. At the heart of the impasse is sovereignty over Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan, and the Habomai islets. Japan insists on their return as a precondition for peace, citing the 1956 Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration, which offered to return Shikotan and Habomai upon treaty conclusion. Russia, however, views the entire Kuril chain as non-negotiable, citing postwar arrangements and strategic imperatives. A viable treaty would likely require:

- A phased or partial territorial resolution, possibly returning two islands while deferring the status of the others.
- A non-aggression clause and mutual recognition of postwar borders.
- Domestic political consensus in both countries, especially in Japan, where any compromise risks nationalist backlash.

Japan has long used economic cooperation as leverage. Abe's eight-point plan—covering energy, infrastructure, healthcare, and agriculture—was designed to build trust and incentivize Russian flexibility. A peace treaty would likely include:

- Joint economic zones on disputed islands, allowing co-development without prejudicing sovereignty.
- Investment guarantees and preferential trade terms, particularly in Russia's Far East.
- Energy cooperation, including LNG projects and Arctic shipping routes, which align with Japan's diversification goals.

However, Western sanctions on Russia—especially post-Ukraine—limit Japan's maneuverability and complicate implementation.

Legal Architecture

A peace treaty would need to reconcile divergent interpretations of international law. Key elements should include the formal termination of the state of war with mutual recognition of sovereignty, clear delineation of maritime boundaries and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) around the disputed islands, and the establishment of robust mechanisms for dispute resolution, potentially through international arbitration or a bilateral commission. The treaty must also remain consistent with Japan's pacifist constitution and Russia's strategic doctrine.

Russia's engagement with North Korea—military, diplomatic, and economic—serves as a strategic lever against U.S. and Japanese influence. Moscow's recent overtures to Pyongyang, including joint military exercises and economic aid,

complicate Tokyo's security calculus. Japan views this as a destabilizing factor, especially amid North Korea's missile tests and nuclear brinkmanship.

For Beijing, Russia's spoiler role is a double-edged sword. It distracts U.S. attention and fragments trilateral coordination (U.S.–Japan–South Korea), but it also risks escalation that could destabilize China's periphery. Thus, both Tokyo and Beijing must weigh Russia's Korean Peninsula posture when considering broader regional alignments—including the feasibility and desirability of a Japan–Russia peace treaty.

In sum, a bilateral peace treaty would require not just bilateral compromise, but a recalibration of regional power dynamics. It is not merely a legal document—it is a strategic pivot, shaped by history, geography, and the shifting architecture of Northeast Asian security.

Case-Study 3: Sea of Okhotsk

The Sea of Okhotsk is a large marginal sea acting as a buffer zone for Russia's Far East. Surrounded almost entirely by Russian Territory except for the boundary near Japan's Hokkaido and the Kuril Islands, it is effectively a Russian inner sea. Control of this area allows Russia to secure its eastern maritime approaches and limit foreign military presence. It is host to Russia's Pacific fleet, its nuclear ballistic missile submarines, which patrol here under protection of Russian naval and air assets. The surrounding geography – island chains and narrow straits – makes it easier for Russia to monitor and restrict foreign naval access. In military strategy, the Sea of Okhotsk is seen as a relatively secure launch zone for Russia's sea-based nuclear deterrent. The sea bed is rich in oil, natural gas, and mineral resources, making it strategically valuable for energy security. Its fisheries are among the most productive in the world – especially Pollock, salmon and crab – and provide both domestic food security and export revenue. Russia has asserted exclusive control by designating parts of the sea as its internal waters, a move challenged under international maritime law.

The southern boundary of the Sea of Okhotsk is entangled with the Kuril Islands dispute between Russia and Japan. Control of these islands ensures Russia's access and dominance over the southern entrances to the sea. For Japan, access to the Sea of Okhotsk is tied to both resource interests and regional security balance.

The Sea sits at the intersection of North-West Asia's power centers: Russia, Japan and indirectly China and the United States. The Sea of Okhotsk is not just a body of water – it is a strategic fortress for Russia's nuclear deterrence, a resource hub and a flashpoint in Russo-Japanese relations.

To foster enduring peace, sustainable ecological

stewardship, and robust regional stability in the Sea of Okhotsk, this initiative seeks a phased approach combining careful territorial reconciliation, collaborative maritime governance, and the systematic integration of advanced EU ocean management technologies. By harmonizing sovereignty claims with shared environmental responsibilities, promoting joint monitoring and resource management, and leveraging

cutting-edge European expertise in maritime conservation and maritime security, the project aims to transform a historically contested maritime space into a model of cooperative, rules-based governance for the 21st century.



Title: Okhotsk Peace and Maritime Cooperation Initiative (OPMCI)

A strategy is a coordinated plan of action designed to achieve long-term objectives by aligning resources, capabilities, and actions with desired ends while accounting for risks and

context. It typically comprises six components: **objectives**, which define desired outcomes; **assessment**, analyzing the environment, actors, and risks; **resource allocation**, distributing capabilities and assets; **courses of action**, outlining broad approaches; **coordination and integration**, ensuring coherence among actors and

actions; and **metrics**, monitoring progress and guiding adjustments. Together, these elements provide the foundation for translating purpose into effective action.

Strategic Components:

The initiative aims to foster long-term peace, ecological stewardship, and regional stability in the Sea of Okhotsk, with specific goals including the partial resolution of the Kuril Islands dispute, the establishment of joint maritime governance, and the development of sustainable economic and research zones. The strategy is informed by a careful assessment of the complex geopolitical environment, which encompasses historical disputes over the Kuril Islands, contested maritime boundaries, domestic political sensitivities in both Japan and Russia, and broader regional security considerations, alongside environmental challenges such as declining fisheries, biodiversity loss, and climate risks. Resources are allocated across multiple domains, including territorial adjustments through the transfer of Shikotan and the Habomai islets to Japan, diplomatic and political capital via a non-aggression clause and mutual recognition of postwar borders, and technological expertise through the deployment of EU satellite monitoring, AI-driven fisheries management, and digital maritime traffic systems. EU investment and technical assistance would further support infrastructure, research, and co-managed economic zones. The initiative adopts a phased approach, beginning with partial territorial resolution while deferring the status of Kunashir and Iturup to a future bilateral commission, followed by the formalization of maritime borders and the creation of the Japan–Russia Ocean Management Council (JROMC) to oversee sustainable maritime governance, complemented by EU technologies to ensure ecological transparency and the development of co-managed economic hubs focusing on aquaculture, renewable energy, and eco-tourism.

Coordination and integration are ensured through neutral third-party monitoring under OSCE or UN auspices, joint governance via JROMC, and inclusive participation from civil society, Indigenous communities, and academic institutions. Both countries would align domestic messaging, framing the initiative in Japan as a pragmatic step toward peace and economic cooperation, and in Russia as a strategic modernization effort, thereby harmonizing governmental, societal, and technical actions. Progress would be evaluated through multiple indicators, including the achievement of territorial reconciliation milestones, compliance with treaty obligations, reductions in maritime incidents, ecological outcomes such as sustainable fisheries and biodiversity protection, socioeconomic measures in co-managed zones, and levels of cross-cultural and scientific collaboration.

Expected Outcomes:

The proposed initiative seeks to **de-escalate territorial tensions like ice melting under the spring sun**, enhance maritime security and ecological resilience, strengthen Japan–Russia diplomatic ties, integrate EU best practices in ocean governance, and promote inclusive development for local and Indigenous communities. Beyond addressing a long-standing geopolitical dispute, this bold effort aspires to transform the Sea of Okhotsk into a **model of strategic co-creation, where science, stewardship, and statecraft seamlessly synchronize**, setting a standard for cooperative management in Northeast Asia. Coupled with a North East Asia Stabilization Forum, it could foster confidence, cultivate collaboration, and create the conditions for a meaningful transformation in the multi-bilateral Nippo-Russian relationship, generating not only formal agreements **but firm foundations for future friendship, fruitful cooperation, and far-reaching progress**, illuminating a path where diplomacy, development, and ecological responsibility advance in harmonious concert.

7. DISCUSSION

Peace initiatives have profound effects on both individuals and communities, bridging the gap between large-scale geopolitical issues and everyday security and well-being. At the individual level, peace initiatives can reduce exposure to violence, trauma, and displacement, fostering a sense of safety, stability, and psychological well-being. For communities, these initiatives often create opportunities for economic development, social cohesion, and cultural exchange, while also reinforcing trust in institutions and cross-border cooperation.

Humanitarian initiatives play a crucial role in this process. By providing essential aid, medical assistance, and support to vulnerable populations, they not only alleviate immediate suffering but also build trust among nations and communities. In North-East Asia, examples include joint disaster relief efforts, such as coordinated responses to typhoons and earthquakes involving China, Japan, and South Korea. Such initiatives have fostered goodwill despite broader political tensions, demonstrating that collaboration on humanitarian grounds can create channels for dialogue and mutual understanding. Similarly, programs promoting health and education in post-conflict areas, like international medical missions in North Korea, contribute to individual well-being while opening limited avenues for diplomatic engagement.

Through these mechanisms, peace initiatives link the abstract goals of geopolitical stability with tangible improvements in personal security and community resilience, showing that humanitarian actions are both

morally imperative and strategically valuable in conflict-prone regions.

To further discuss human security involves several factors as already outlined above.

Personal Security

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) remains an outlier in the region, where personal security is not merely compromised but structurally subordinated to political repression and state violence. UN human rights reports and qualitative assessments underscore systemic surveillance, arbitrary detention, and enforced disappearances as endemic features of daily life. In contrast, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) exhibit exceptionally low homicide rates and minimal criminal threats, yet their personal security profiles are complicated by acute exposure to natural disasters—earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, and wildfires—which constitute significant, often underappreciated, vectors of vulnerability. Russia and northern China present a more complex picture: while homicide rates exceed those of Japan/ROK, they remain well below thresholds typical of active conflict zones. However, localized insecurity—especially in border regions and areas with weak institutional oversight—warrants closer scrutiny.

Economic Security

Economic stratification across Northeast Asia is starkly illustrated by GDP per capita, particularly in the bifurcation between North and South Korea. The ROK's diversified, innovation-driven economy contrasts sharply with the DPRK's isolationist, militarized model. Mongolia's economic profile is shaped by its dependence on extractive industries and persistent rural poverty, which together amplify vulnerability to external shocks and internal stagnation. Northern China's aggregate indicators—GDP and unemployment—conceal significant subnational disparities, especially in interior provinces where industrial decline and rural underdevelopment persist. For the meeting, triangulating GDP per capita with unemployment rates and rural poverty metrics will yield a more granular and actionable understanding of economic security across the region.

Health and Food Security

Health system strength is effectively captured through life expectancy and the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) index. Japan and the ROK rank among the global leaders, reflecting robust infrastructure, preventive care, and equitable access. Mongolia occupies a mid-range position, with notable urban-rural divides. The DPRK and remote regions of China exhibit systemic weaknesses, with limited access to essential services and chronic underinvestment. Most alarming is the DPRK's undernourishment prevalence, flagged by WFP and FAO

estimates as the region's most acute food-security crisis. This indicator should be treated not merely as a humanitarian concern but as a strategic red flag with implications for regional stability and cross-border resilience.

Environmental Security

PM2.5 concentrations offer a standardized lens into chronic environmental health risks. Northern China and Mongolia's capital, Ulaanbaatar, register among the highest particulate pollution levels globally, with direct consequences for respiratory health, productivity, and long-term morbidity. Japan, while enjoying relatively cleaner air, faces elevated disaster exposure—particularly seismic and hydrological events—that complicate its environmental security calculus. Integrating PM2.5 data with disaster risk profiles will allow for a multidimensional assessment of environmental vulnerability across urban and peri-urban zones.

Political Security and Community Cohesion

Freedom House and UN human rights reporting delineate clear regime typologies: DPRK is repressive, China authoritarian, while Japan, ROK, and Mongolia maintain democratic governance structures. However, political security cannot be reduced to regime classification alone. Minority discrimination—especially in northern China's ethnic policy frameworks—and unresolved historical grievances between Japan and Korea introduce latent tensions that shape community cohesion and regional diplomacy. These issues require qualitative treatment, ideally supported by event timelines and policy evolution charts. If helpful, I can assist in drafting a concise timeline slide to anchor this dimension in historical and geopolitical context.

Crime and environmental security in Northeast Asia reveal a complex interplay of institutional strength, latent vulnerabilities, and transboundary risks. Japan, South Korea, and China consistently report low crime indices, reflecting strong governance, social cohesion, and effective policing. These states benefit from high levels of public trust and infrastructural resilience. In contrast, Mongolia and North Korea exhibit significantly higher crime rates, particularly in urban and border regions where institutional oversight is weaker and economic precarity more pronounced. Russia's Far East, though less frequently disaggregated in global indices, is known for elevated levels of organized crime and trafficking, often linked to extractive industries and porous frontiers.

Environmental security presents a more diffuse but equally urgent challenge. Northern China and Ulaanbaatar suffer from some of the highest PM2.5 concentrations globally, driven by coal combustion, industrial emissions,

and vehicular density. These chronic stressors are compounded by acute disruptions such as dust storms, which originate in expanding desert zones and sweep across borders, affecting air quality and public health in Korea and Japan. Marine degradation is another shared concern: the Yellow Sea, East China Sea, and Sea of Japan are increasingly burdened by algal blooms, plastic pollution, and biodiversity

loss. China's coastal regions contribute disproportionately to marine litter, with millions of tons of plastic waste entering the ocean annually. Japan and South Korea, while less culpable, are deeply affected by these transboundary flows.



The radar chart compares human security across Northeast Asian countries, highlighting disparities in personal, economic, health, food, and political dimensions. Japan and South Korea consistently score highest, representing the regional benchmark for human security. China and Mongolia show moderate performance, while North Korea and eastern Russia lag significantly. Personal security is strongest in Japan and South Korea due to low crime and strong law enforcement. Economic security is led by South Korea, with Japan close behind, while others face instability and weaker safety nets. Health and food security are uneven, with Japan and South Korea again leading, and North Korea and Russia showing critical vulnerabilities. Political commitment is highest in Japan and South Korea, reflecting effective governance and rule of law. The goal for other countries is to close the gap by improving healthcare, food systems, economic stability, and governance. North Korea and eastern Russia require the most urgent attention due to their low scores across multiple dimensions. Overall, the region should aim for balanced, high-level human security modeled after Japan and South Korea's resilient systems.

Data availability is uneven but improving. Crime statistics are accessible through platforms like Numbeo and World Population Review, while environmental metrics—particularly air quality and marine health—are tracked by WHO, UNEP, and regional observatories. However, interoperability remains limited, and data sovereignty concerns often inhibit cross-border sharing. Strengthening

regional data systems, ensuring transparency, and fostering comparability are essential steps toward coordinated action.

In the shadow of geopolitical conflict, these issues acquire heightened significance. Crime and environmental degradation are not merely domestic concerns; they are vectors of instability that transcend borders and erode trust. Addressing them through technocratic collaboration—air quality monitoring, disaster preparedness, marine conservation—offers politically neutral ground for engagement. Such cooperation can soften antagonisms, build institutional linkages, and reframe regional security as a shared human challenge rather than a zero-sum contest. In this sense, environmental and crime-related vulnerabilities are not peripheral—they are central to the architecture of regional order in Northeast Asia. They offer a pathway toward pragmatic diplomacy, grounded not in ideology but in mutual survival.

8. DESIGN OF A NORTH EAST ASIA FORUM

Organizations like the **United Nations (UN)**, the **European Union (EU)**, and other global actors play critical roles in supporting peace initiatives in Northeast Asia by providing platforms for dialogue, mediation, and coordinated humanitarian and development assistance.

Their involvement helps to translate high-level diplomatic efforts into concrete actions that enhance security and stability for both individuals and communities.

The **United Nations** supports peace in Northeast Asia through its specialized agencies and peacebuilding mechanisms. For instance, UN programs in the region have focused on humanitarian aid, food security, and medical assistance, particularly in North Korea, where the UN World Food Programme and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) have worked to reduce malnutrition and support vulnerable populations. Beyond direct aid, UN-led forums facilitate multilateral dialogue, such as discussions under the Six-Party Talks framework, which have historically sought to address nuclear tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

The **European Union** contributes through diplomatic engagement, development cooperation, and humanitarian assistance. The EU often acts as an impartial mediator and supporter of confidence-building measures, providing technical expertise, funding for peace-related projects, and fostering interregional cooperation. Programs promoting educational exchanges, cultural dialogue, and disaster preparedness have helped build trust among nations and communities in Northeast Asia.

Collaborative efforts with external actors have historically strengthened peace processes in the region. The Six-Party Talks, involving North and South Korea, the United States, China, Japan, and Russia, exemplify multilateral collaboration aimed at nuclear non-proliferation and regional stability. Similarly, trilateral humanitarian initiatives, such as coordinated responses to natural disasters in the region, have demonstrated that practical cooperation can continue even amid political tension, building networks of trust that support longer-term peace efforts.

By combining **mediation, humanitarian support, and multilateral collaboration**, these organizations help transform geopolitical tensions into opportunities for dialogue and cooperation, ultimately improving security, stability, and well-being for communities across Northeast Asia.

We take the next step in this piece.

Context

The need for a Northeast Asia Stabilisation Forum (NEAF) stems from the enduring volatility and fragmentation of the region's geopolitical environment. Northeast Asia hosts some

of the world's most advanced economies—China, Japan, and South Korea—alongside states with fragile security postures, contested sovereignties, and unresolved wars such as North Korea. The region is marked by historical animosities, nuclear risks, maritime disputes, and competing spheres of influence involving external actors like the United States and the European Union.

Existing dialogues—such as bilateral summits, the Six-Party Talks, and various ad hoc security consultations—have proven too episodic, narrowly focused, or vulnerable to political fluctuations to build sustained trust. This has left Northeast Asia without a stable, permanent platform for dialogue and cooperative problem-solving. A dedicated, institutionalised Northeast Asia Forum could fill this vacuum. By offering continuity, predictability, and inclusivity, it would help defuse tensions, stimulate economic integration, and promote a shared sense of regional responsibility.

The Forum's participants

The Forum would bring together China, Japan, South Korea, Russia, North Korea, and Mongolia, with the United States and the European Union serving as external partners or observers. This inclusive approach would ensure that all major regional and global stakeholders are engaged. To guarantee equitable participation, a rotating presidency among the core members would foster a sense of shared ownership and prevent the dominance of any single power. Each presidency could last one or two years, setting the agenda and representing the Forum internationally.

To provide continuity and institutional memory, a permanent secretariat could be established in a neutral country such as Mongolia. This would serve as the administrative hub, coordinating activities and offering policy and technical support. Under the Forum's umbrella, sectoral committees would address the most pressing domains of regional cooperation. These committees could focus on economic cooperation and connectivity, security and crisis management, environmental and human security, and human rights and historical reconciliation. Each committee would ideally be co-chaired by states from different political alignments to maintain balance and trust.



Stakeholder Engagement

The Forum would thrive by incorporating not only governments but also the wider ecosystem of regional actors. Track II and Track 1.5 diplomacy mechanisms would bring in universities, think tanks, civil society organisations, and business leaders alongside government officials. This would enrich discussions with diverse perspectives and help depoliticise certain areas of cooperation.

People-to-people exchange programmes would be central to building trust. Youth forums, cultural exchanges, and joint educational initiatives could help soften nationalist narratives and address historical grievances across generations. The private sector would also play a vital role through regional business councils that promote investment, innovation partnerships, and infrastructure projects aligned with sustainable development goals.

Regularity and Flexibility

The Forum's credibility would depend on consistent engagement and its ability to adapt to changing conditions. An annual leaders' summit could serve as the high-level moment for setting priorities, reviewing progress, and reaffirming commitments. Ministerial-level meetings, held twice a year, would advance technical work in the sectoral committees.

To respond swiftly to emerging crises, the Forum could establish rapid convening protocols for emergency sessions, allowing timely interventions in cases of security escalations or natural disasters. A rolling three-year agenda, updated annually, would ensure that the Forum remains responsive to

new challenges such as cyber threats, supply chain disruptions, or energy security shocks.

Key Areas of Activity

The Forum could play a transformative role in deepening regional economic integration. One central initiative could be a feasibility study for a China–Japan–Korea Free Trade Area, which would unlock substantial growth potential and strengthen supply chains. This could be complemented by the creation of a Northeast Asia Economic Corridor, integrating logistics, digital infrastructure, and energy grids. The Forum could also establish joint funds for green energy research and technology development, fostering innovation and reducing duplication of efforts.

Human security would be another priority. A regional environmental governance compact could coordinate responses to climate change, biodiversity loss, and natural disasters. Public health cooperation could be advanced through shared genomic surveillance systems, pooled emergency stockpiles, and coordinated pandemic response protocols, enhancing regional resilience.

On security, the Forum could work to design maritime conflict de-escalation protocols and direct hotlines between militaries to prevent incidents at sea and in disputed airspaces. Confidence-building measures, such as prior notification of military exercises and missile tests, could reduce misperceptions. Over time, the Forum could serve as a venue for gradual discussions on nuclear risk reduction, including North Korea's arsenal, built on

phased trust-building steps.

A lasting peace will also depend on addressing the region's unresolved historical grievances. The Forum could establish a joint historical commission of scholars to produce shared educational materials, curate cross-border museum exhibits, and host public dialogues. It could support textbook revision initiatives that challenge inflammatory nationalist narratives and encourage mutual understanding among younger generations.

Designing the Forum

The Northeast Asia Forum would require a carefully balanced institutional design to ensure credibility, inclusivity, and resilience. Its legal foundation could be built through a **multilateral founding treaty**, negotiated and signed by the participating states, which would codify the Forum's principles, objectives, and institutional framework. This treaty could be deliberately light and flexible, modelled on foundational charters of other regional organisations such as ASEAN, avoiding overly rigid legal commitments in the initial phase. A legally binding agreement, ratified by national parliaments, would nonetheless give the Forum durability and shield it from abrupt political reversals.

Decision-making should combine efficiency with safeguards for sovereignty. A **Council of Member States**, composed of foreign ministers or their equivalents, would act as the main decision-making body. This Council would take decisions by **consensus wherever possible**, while allowing for **qualified majority voting on technical matters** to prevent paralysis. Below the Council, **sectoral committees** would handle specific policy areas—economic cooperation, security and crisis management, environmental and human security, and human rights and reconciliation. These committees would be empowered to draft proposals, coordinate projects, and monitor implementation, while reporting back to the Council. A **rotating presidency** would ensure equitable representation and avoid dominance by any one state. The presidency would set the agenda for a fixed term, chair meetings, and represent the Forum externally. Supporting this rotating structure, a **permanent secretariat** could be based in a neutral host state such as Mongolia, providing administrative continuity, institutional memory, and technical expertise. The secretariat would include a small staff of international civil servants recruited from across the member states, bound by neutrality.

Financing would come from **assessed contributions** by member states based on their GDP and capacity to pay, supplemented by **voluntary contributions, project-based funding, and external partner support** from the EU and international organisations. A modest core budget would fund the secretariat, meetings, and baseline activities, while a separate trust fund could finance larger cooperative projects

in infrastructure, environmental protection, and public health. This hybrid model would reduce dependency on any single donor and strengthen collective ownership.

The Forum could be established gradually through **four main stages**. An initial **Track 1.5 dialogue phase** would convene government officials, experts, and business leaders to build consensus on its scope and priorities. A second **ministerial negotiation phase** would draft and finalise the founding treaty and institutional charter. A third **provisional launch phase** would inaugurate the Forum with a small secretariat, pilot committees, and voluntary funding. Finally, after a review conference, the Forum would enter a **fully operational phase** with a legally ratified charter, formal membership, and a stable budget. This phased approach would allow trust to grow organically and reduce the political risks of overcommitment.

By embedding clear legal foundations, balanced decision-making rules, sustainable financing, and a cautious stepwise path to establishment, the Northeast Asia Forum could transform from a fragile concept into a durable institution able to outlast political cycles and manage the region's complex interdependence.

For purely illustrative purposes, an example of a Treaty on the establishment is provided in **appendix B**. Add to this Sectoral Cooperation Agreements to delineate a series of specialized sub-agreements aimed at enhancing regional integration and resilience across critical domains, including public health infrastructure, agri-food systems, transboundary border management, and ecological sustainability. These agreements are calibrated to reflect the specific developmental and security needs of Northeast Asia. The Civil Society and Stakeholder Engagement annex could articulate the modalities through which non-governmental organizations, research institutions, and local communities are incorporated into the forum's deliberative and operational processes. It emphasizes participatory governance and the co-production of knowledge and policy.

The Technology and Data Sharing Protocols annex could codify normative standards for digital security, cross-border data interoperability, and collaborative scientific inquiry. It seeks to foster trust and transparency in the exchange of information among member states. Consider also the elaboration of a Timeline and Implementation Roadmap to outline a sequenced framework for the deployment of forum initiatives, specifying temporal benchmarks, evaluative intervals, and adaptive mechanisms to accommodate shifting geopolitical and developmental contexts.

Failure of Existing Dialogues

Efforts to manage tensions in Northeast Asia have long been constrained by the fragmented and issue-specific nature of existing dialogues. Most regional initiatives have focused on isolated problems—such as nuclear proliferation, trade disputes, or maritime incidents—without addressing the deeper historical and structural tensions that underlie them. This narrow scope often produces only temporary fixes. Agreements reached in these settings rarely touch on the trust deficits, security dilemmas, or competing national narratives that continue to shape the region's politics. As a result, conflicts are not resolved but merely paused, ready to resurface whenever political winds shift.

Bilateral mechanisms, while sometimes useful for crisis de-escalation, have often deepened rivalries rather than reduced them. When major powers negotiate exclusively with each other, they can inadvertently marginalise smaller or less influential states, reinforcing perceptions of exclusion and mistrust. This dynamic is especially evident in the triangular relationships between China, Japan, and South Korea, where bilateral summits tend to oscillate between breakthroughs and breakdowns, rarely producing stable or inclusive outcomes. North Korea's engagement through bilateral channels has also proven unreliable, as agreements often collapse once external pressures or internal political calculations change.

Underlying these shortcomings is the absence of any long-term, region-wide vision. Negotiations are frequently driven by immediate crises or shifting domestic agendas rather than a shared sense of regional community. This short-termism makes agreements fragile and unsustainable: they are designed to solve immediate disputes rather than to build enduring frameworks of cooperation. Without a permanent platform to institutionalise dialogue, cultivate trust, and manage change, even the most ambitious diplomatic efforts are left exposed to sudden reversals. The collapse of the Six-Party Talks exemplifies this pattern—once the urgency of the moment faded, the lack of institutional anchoring allowed the process to disintegrate, leaving behind deeper cynicism and strategic fatigue.

This persistent cycle of ad hoc engagement and abrupt collapse has created a vacuum in regional governance. It has normalised mistrust as the default condition of relations in Northeast Asia, while reinforcing the perception that cooperation is fleeting and fragile. A new framework must therefore be comprehensive, inclusive, and durable, capable of addressing not only immediate disputes but also the deeper structural forces that sustain them.

La Tristeza

The prospect of Korean unification represents both an extraordinary opportunity and a formidable challenge, with estimated costs potentially exceeding one to two trillion U.S.

dollars over one to two decades. Modernizing North Korea's infrastructure, including transportation, energy, and telecommunications, while simultaneously expanding social welfare, education, and healthcare, will demand unprecedented fiscal and administrative effort. The demilitarization and reintegration of North Korea's armed forces further compound the financial and logistical burden, requiring tens of billions in targeted programs. Achieving unification necessitates reaching a critical mass across economic, social, political, and international dimensions, ensuring that neither society nor governance structures collapse under the strain of integration. Economic critical mass requires North Korea to attain sufficient infrastructural and institutional stability, enabling productive participation in a unified economy without overwhelming South Korean systems. Social critical mass relies on widespread public support, trust-building, and gradual cultural integration, fostering readiness on both sides to embrace profound systemic change. Political critical mass demands elite alignment and credible leadership committed to phased integration, while international critical mass calls for sustained support from China, the United States, Japan, Russia, and other key stakeholders to provide security guarantees and investment. Conditions for change include robust economic incentives, reconciliation initiatives, security frameworks, and multilateral cooperation to manage transitional risks and prevent external exploitation. A phased, deliberate approach is essential, balancing rapid modernization with careful attention to societal cohesion and institutional capacity. Ultimately, the success of unification hinges not merely on financial resources but on the simultaneous alignment of human, political, and international factors, transforming the Korean Peninsula from division to sustainable peace and shared prosperity. Northeast Asia stands at a pivotal moment where strategic investment could transform the region into a hub of sustainable development and connectivity. Modernizing transport networks, including roads, railways, ports, and airports, is essential to foster regional integration and facilitate the efficient movement of goods and people. Complementing physical infrastructure, the expansion of telecommunications and digital networks, including broadband and next-generation technologies, will underpin economic growth and enhance cross-border collaboration. Energy development, particularly the deployment of renewable sources and the creation of transnational energy grids, is critical to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and promote environmental sustainability. Environmental protection measures, ranging from pollution control to disaster resilience and climate adaptation, are required to safeguard the region's natural resources and ensure long-term stability. Trade and

economic integration can be accelerated through the establishment of special economic zones and cross-border development corridors, while the modernization of logistics

and customs procedures will reduce transaction costs and facilitate smoother commercial flows.

Dimension	Northeast Asia	Korean Unification
Estimated Investment Needs	\$1.0–1.6 trillion USD over 10 years	\$1–2 trillion USD over 10–20 years
Focus Areas	Infrastructure modernization, digital networks, renewable energy, environmental sustainability, trade integration, human capital, social services	North Korean infrastructure and industrial upgrading, social welfare and healthcare expansion, workforce development, demilitarization, economic integration
Critical Mass Factors	Regional cooperation among China, Japan, South Korea, Mongolia, Russia; multilateral financing; stable political and economic conditions	Elite alignment in North Korea, public support in both Koreas, international security guarantees, phased integration strategies
Implementation Challenges	Coordinating policies across diverse national interests, ensuring efficient allocation of funds, addressing environmental risks	Bridging economic disparities, managing social integration, preventing political instability, mitigating potential refugee and humanitarian crises
Timeframe for Transformation	10–15 years for infrastructure and trade integration, longer for human capital and energy transition	10–20 years for full integration and stabilization, with phased milestones in infrastructure, governance, and security

Investment in human capital is equally important, with education, vocational training, and workforce development initiatives providing the skills necessary to support industrial modernization and technological innovation. Strengthening healthcare systems and social services will not only improve quality of life but also enhance societal resilience against pandemics and other systemic shocks. Effective implementation will require phased, coordinated investment supported by public-private partnerships, regional financial institutions, and multilateral organizations, ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently and sustainably. By aligning infrastructure, energy, trade, environmental, and social investments within a comprehensive regional strategy, Northeast Asia can generate multiplier effects that foster long-term growth, stability, and shared prosperity. Current estimates suggest that Northeast Asia may require between **\$1.0 and \$1.6 trillion USD** in investment over the next decade to achieve these objectives, whereas the cost of integrating a unified Korean Peninsula could reach **\$1–2 trillion USD**, reflecting the high concentration of development needs and social transformation in the North.

In the context of Korean unification, these regional investments acquire even greater urgency and significance. Modernization of North Korea's infrastructure and social systems will be essential to integrate its economy and population into a unified peninsula. Coordinated regional

support and investment can provide the critical mass needed to stabilize transitional governance and prevent social disruption. The unification process will also require security guarantees, multilateral engagement, and phased economic integration to ensure sustainable development and political cohesion. By embedding Korean unification within the broader Northeast Asian development framework, the region can transform a historic challenge into an opportunity for unprecedented cooperation, growth, and lasting peace.

A comparative analysis of Northeast Asia's regional investment needs and the projected requirements for Korean unification highlights both shared and distinct challenges in the pursuit of stability and development. Northeast Asia, encompassing China, Japan, South Korea, Mongolia, and parts of Russia, faces an estimated investment requirement of approximately \$1.0–1.6 trillion USD over the next decade, directed toward infrastructure modernization, digital networks, renewable energy, environmental sustainability, trade facilitation, and human capital development. In contrast, Korean unification is projected to require \$1–2 trillion USD over a longer horizon of ten to twenty years, reflecting the concentrated scale of development required in North Korea, including industrial upgrading, social welfare

expansion, workforce development, demilitarization, and economic integration.

In the pursuit of stability and prosperity across Northeast Asia, the realization of critical mass rests upon the careful orchestration of political will, economic collaboration, and the steady hand of governance among the region's principal states, supported by multilateral financing that ensures shared commitment and mutual accountability. By contrast, the unification of the Korean Peninsula demands a more delicate calibration: the alignment of elites within the North, the preparedness of both societies to embrace profound change, credible international guarantees of security, and a phased strategy that tempers ambition with prudence. The challenges that accompany these endeavors differ not merely in degree but in kind. Northeast Asia must navigate the complexity of divergent national interests, the judicious allocation of resources, and the ever-present specter of environmental risk. Korean unification, in turn, must confront the weight of economic disparity, the intricacies of social integration, the potential for political upheaval, and the humanitarian consequences that may accompany rapid transformation. Time magnifies these distinctions: regional infrastructure and trade integration may be achieved within a decade or so, yet the stabilization of a unified Korea will require a patient, deliberate, and staged approach across the realms of governance, security, and societal cohesion. From an analytical perspective, the contrast illuminates a profound truth: whereas the development of Northeast Asia is a task of systemic coordination and distribution, Korean unification is an exercise of concentrated, high-stakes integration, in which failure to attain critical mass in any dimension could imperil the whole. The lesson is clear for scholars and practitioners alike: resources, though essential, are insufficient in themselves; only the harmonious alignment of structural, institutional, and social capacities can transform investment into enduring peace and prosperity. In this, both regional strategy and unification planning call for foresight, prudence, and the steady cultivation of conditions that render ambition both achievable and sustainable.

The Case for a Comprehensive Multilateral Forum

A well-designed Northeast Asia Forum, anchored in a multilateral framework and supported by comprehensive engagement strategies, could serve as a transformative instrument for the region. By institutionalising dialogue, it would replace the current pattern of episodic and reactive interactions with a stable, predictable, and inclusive platform. Unlike existing arrangements that are narrowly focused or dominated by bilateral rivalries, such a forum would embed all major regional actors in a shared governance structure, reducing zero-sum dynamics and preventing any single state from monopolising the agenda. The permanence and

neutrality of the institution itself would help insulate regional cooperation from sudden shifts in domestic politics, a major weakness of previous initiatives.

Central to its mission would be the advancement of regional economic collaboration. By pooling resources and coordinating policies, the forum could accelerate projects that no single country could pursue alone, such as integrated transport corridors, regional energy grids, and joint research in green technologies. Economic cooperation of this scale would create material incentives for peace by intertwining national interests, making the costs of conflict higher and the benefits of stability clearer. Equally important would be its focus on human security. The region faces shared transnational threats—climate change, pandemics, environmental degradation, and natural disasters—that require collective responses. The forum could coordinate joint early-warning systems, cross-border emergency protocols, and shared stockpiles of critical medical and relief supplies. These initiatives would not only enhance resilience but also foster practical trust through tangible cooperation that directly benefits citizens across borders.

In considering the future of Northeast Asia, one must recognize that stability and prosperity cannot be achieved by chance, but only through careful coordination among the region's principal states. Political will, economic cooperation, and the steady hand of governance must guide the deployment of resources, while multilateral institutions ensure that no party bears an unfair burden. On the Korean Peninsula, the task is yet more delicate. There, the alignment of North Korean elites, the readiness of both societies to embrace change, and credible guarantees from the international community are necessary before integration can proceed.

The challenges differ in character: in Northeast Asia, the concern is the distribution of resources and the management of diverse national interests; in Korea, the concern is bridging stark economic gaps, fostering social cohesion, and mitigating political instability. Time too plays a role: regional infrastructure and trade integration may be accomplished within a decade, yet a unified Korea will require a patient, phased approach, addressing governance, security, and social systems in sequence. From this comparison, it is clear that financial investment alone is insufficient; success depends on the alignment of structural, institutional, and societal capacities. Only through careful planning, prudent timing, and steady engagement can ambition be transformed into enduring peace and prosperity. In this way, regional strategy and Korean unification must proceed together, each reinforcing the other, so that neither the burdens of the past nor the weight of present inequalities undermines the future.

RENOVI – Regional Order and the Geopolitics of Asia

The view from Indian geopolitical scholars is Asia is moving from a Post-Cold war era of economic interdependence into an era where great power politics – notably China's rise – is reshaping regional alignments. India must be positively engaged across Asia while protecting strategic autonomy. Menon argues for a pragmatic multi-vector engagement not strict balancing, strengthening institutions, and creating norms that preserve open pluralist orders in Asia. He emphasizes the importance of **regional institutions** (like ASEAN, SCO, and BIMSTEC) to manage tensions and foster cooperation, rather than relying solely on military deterrence. Menon calls for **norm-building that supports open, inclusive, and pluralist orders** in Asia, resisting hegemonic models that impose uniformity or dominance. He sees India as a **civilizational state** with the capacity to engage flexibly across ideological divides, leveraging its strategic autonomy to shape outcomes without being trapped in binary choices. Menon in *India and Asian Geopolitics* advocates **strategic patience** and **contextual decision-making**, arguing that Asia's complexity demands adaptability rather than doctrinal rigidity. His approach contrasts with more hawkish or alliance-driven models, offering a vision of diplomacy rooted in realism, flexibility, and long-term stability.

In *World Upside Down: India Recalibrates Its Geopolitics* (2023), Sujan R. Chinoy explores how India is navigating a rapidly shifting global order marked by multipolarity, strategic hedging, and geopolitical flux. The world has moved from **bipolarity (Cold War) to unipolarity (U.S. dominance)** and now toward **multipolarity**, with the U.S., China, EU, Russia, Japan, and India as major players. Chinoy emphasizes that **hedging and multi-alignment** have become the norm, replacing rigid alliances. He recommends India is seizing this moment to **assert itself as a pole** in the emerging order, and argues that India is **leveraging its strengths**—economic growth, diplomatic agility, and strategic geography—to shape global outcomes. North Korea is not central to India's immediate strategic concerns, but it features in the broader **Indo-Pacific security architecture**, especially through India's engagement with the **Quad** and its partnerships with Japan, South Korea, and the U.S. Chinoy's emphasis on multi-alignment suggests that India maintains a cautious, non-confrontational stance toward North Korea, avoiding entanglement while supporting global non-proliferation norms, part of its **strategic autonomy**—supporting stability without becoming a direct stakeholder in Northeast Asian tensions. The relationship with Japan is more important than with Pyongyang.

The European Union recognizes that India represents a critical mass in shaping a more sustainable and cooperative Asia—an Asia that, while economically vibrant, remains politically fragmented and institutionally underdeveloped. India's

strategic autonomy, diplomatic agility, and normative influence position it as a stabilizing force capable of bridging divides across the continent. In contrast, Northeast Asia remains one of the most militarized and geopolitically volatile regions, burdened by unresolved historical legacies such as the division of the Korean Peninsula, persistent maritime disputes, and the intensifying strategic rivalry between the United States and China.

Despite these tensions, economic interdependence continues to bind China, Japan, and South Korea through deeply integrated regional supply chains. However, U.S. military alliances with Japan and South Korea complicate China's strategic calculus, reinforcing bloc dynamics that hinder cooperative security frameworks. North Korea's nuclear program remains a persistent destabilizing factor, exacerbating mistrust and limiting diplomatic flexibility.

Europe's direct influence in Northeast Asia is limited, yet it can play a constructive role by supporting multilateral platforms such as the Northeast Asia Stabilisation Forum and by strengthening the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) as vehicles for dialogue, stability, and sustainable cooperation. A forward-looking strategy would involve all regional actors—including China, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, the U.S., Russia, and India—engaging in inclusive dialogue that prioritizes Eurasian integration and development. This approach must avoid reproducing rigid power blocs, whether Sino-centric, Sino-U.S. dominated, or locked in Sino-Russian-DPRK alignments. Instead, it should foster a pluralistic framework grounded in strategic autonomy and multilateral balancing, where norms and institutions—not coercion—guide regional order.

The ASEM process, as it stands today, is adrift. It lacks the structure, coherence, and strategic direction needed to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. This is not a time for passive observation or shallow gestures of cooperation. It is a moment that demands leadership, clarity, and purpose. Europe and Asia must stop mirroring each other in outdated patterns of rivalry and instead rise to the challenge of shaping a shared future. ASEAN, the Northeast Asia Stabilisation Forum, and the India-Japan-China triangle must step forward—not as fragmented voices, but as a coordinated force capable of guiding the evolution of ASEM into a platform of genuine influence. When aligned, these actors can generate the momentum needed for a New EU-Asia Strategy—one that carries shared norms, fosters inclusive growth, and resists the gravitational pull of binary blocs, bipolar tensions, and tripolar instability.

This is not just about grand strategy or mutual mirror effects. It is about building trust—through education, cultural exchange, and economic collaboration. Small

initiatives matter. They are the seeds of resilience, the proof of commitment, and the scaffolding of deeper integration. The Northeast Asia Stabilisation Forum must be empowered to pilot real solutions: strategic partnerships, infrastructure development, détente, and ocean governance. These are not abstract ideals—they are tangible steps that test our agility, our resolve, and our capacity to lead.

Trust is not declared; it is earned. It forms slowly, through repeated engagement, shared effort, and honest dialogue. Cooperation must be cultivated deliberately, with ambition guided by wisdom. Left unchecked, ambition can destabilize. But when channeled with care, it becomes a force for growth, stability, and prosperity.

We are not spectators to history—we are its authors. Every initiative, every negotiation, every act of courage adds to a narrative that must be written with purpose. The future of Eurasia depends on our ability to think boldly, act decisively, and lead collectively. Let us not waste this moment.

CONCLUSIONS

The Korean Peninsula will not be stabilized through a single breakthrough. Instead, progress depends on building layers of trust, embedding institutional mechanisms, and aligning incentives for cooperation. Russia and China's competition over influence in Pyongyang complicates this task but also offers opportunities. By integrating both powers into new multilateral forums and giving them constructive roles as guarantors and providers, their rivalry can be channeled into structured cooperation rather than destabilizing competition. Policymakers should therefore embrace a strategy of stable coexistence as the near-term goal, rather than demanding immediate denuclearization. They should move swiftly to establish a small, high-level stabilization forum that includes all six regional actors and empowers a dedicated verification unit. They should pursue sectoral economic packages that provide North Korea with tangible benefits while anchoring compliance in measurable steps. Finally, they must craft security guarantees that involve both Beijing and Moscow, ensuring that great power competition does not undercut the fragile possibility of peace.

In this way, the peninsula can move incrementally toward a more predictable, less crisis-prone order, while the larger contest between China and Russia for regional influence is managed within a framework that privileges stability over rivalry. The alternative is to continue relying on outdated formats and maximalist goals that leave Northeast Asia exposed to cycles of provocation and escalation. The time has come to embrace a new diplomacy—layered, incremental, and realistic—that can finally begin to build a stable order in Northeast Asia.

Achieving a stable order in Northeast Asia necessitates a multifaceted approach that comprehensively addresses both

historical grievances and contemporary geopolitical realities. The persistent threat of nuclear proliferation on the Korean Peninsula underscores the urgency for the implementation of cohesive diplomatic initiatives that effectively unite regional actors. Furthermore, fostering economic interdependence among Japan, South Korea, and China serves not only to build trust but also to create a robust framework for the resolution of conflicts.

The establishment of a Northeast Asia Stabilization Forum would provide a vital platform for ongoing dialogue, thereby transforming competitive rivalries into collaborative opportunities for peace. Through the implementation of phased confidence-building measures, regional stakeholders can systematically dismantle the barriers that have historically hindered cooperation and mutual understanding. Additionally, emphasizing transparency in governance and the management of cross-border resources is essential for mitigating suspicions and ensuring stability in economic engagements.

Engaging external stakeholders, such as the United States and the European Union, can significantly enhance the prospects for sustainable security mechanisms that transcend regional tensions. By prioritizing humanitarian initiatives and joint development projects, countries can cultivate goodwill, thus paving the way for broader security dialogues. The historical precedents of conflict in Northeast Asia reaffirm the notion that enduring peace is achieved through incremental trust-building rather than through ambitious and immediate transformations.

Ultimately, a commitment to a balanced strategy that intertwines diplomacy, economic collaboration, and respect for international norms is crucial for shaping a peaceful and prosperous future for the region.

The study's findings on human security in Northeast Asia highlight substantial differences in security dimensions across northern China, Mongolia, the two Koreas, Japan, and eastern Siberia. The marked personal insecurity in North Korea correlates with existing research that underscores the impact of authoritarian regimes on citizens' rights and freedom. In contrast, South Korea's enhanced security framework juxtaposes its military tensions with the North, indicating a complex relationship between perceived threats and actual safety.

Economic disparities, particularly between North and South Korea, affirm prior studies indicating that economic interdependence is often overshadowed by historical grievances. North Korea's dire economic condition continues to reflect decades of isolation, resonating with findings from earlier analyses. Similarly, Mongolia's vulnerability to mining dependency has been documented, revealing limited economic diversification.

The assessment of health security aligns with previous literature showing that health outcomes are often

determined by access rather than mere existence of healthcare systems. The prevalence of food insecurity in North Korea and the agricultural challenges faced by Mongolia are consistent with historical data on food crises in fragile states. Environmental security findings echo ongoing research indicating that rapid industrialization in northern China leads to adverse environmental outcomes, posing long-term health risks and challenging sustainability efforts.

The current study confirms and expands upon previous research suggesting that national security issues directly impact individual human security across Northeast Asia. Earlier studies have emphasized the interconnectedness of these dimensions, asserting that historical grievances and political instability contribute to persistent societal vulnerabilities. The findings also resonate with theories of human security that advocate for comprehensive approaches to safety encompassing economic, health, and environmental dimensions.

Under my leadership, the EU's engagement will be tuned into strengthened diplomatic engagement of North Korea to addresses its sense of security, on the provision of tool and techniques to the North East Asian multilateral forum, on the partnering-up in the Sea of Okhotsk and on environmental security issues . The financing of a feasibility study on a hyperloop connection between South Korea and Japan is relevant. We would be satisfied to see an EU operator such as APM Terminal or CMA CMC engaged in the operation of the Yokohama harbor.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The implications of these findings are both theoretical and empirical. Theoretically, they reinforce the notion that a multidimensional approach to security could be a relevant concept, emphasizing the importance of integrating diverse aspects—social, economic, environmental, and political—into security frameworks. Empirically, the study provides a robust basis for policymakers and scholars seeking to understand the nuanced security dynamics in Northeast Asia. It highlights the urgent need for collaborative approaches to address the systemic vulnerabilities faced by different nations in the region.

Several limitations must be acknowledged in this study. Firstly, the reliance on secondary data sources may affect the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the findings; new qualitative data collection could provide richer insights. Secondly, the context-specific nature of human security implies that findings may not be universally applicable across different sub-regions or demographic groups within Northeast Asia. Additionally, the temporal scope of the data may not fully account for dynamic changes in security situations influenced by geopolitical shifts or emerging crises.

Further Research

Future research should explore the following avenues:

Qualitative Studies: Conducting in-depth interviews and case studies in vulnerable communities could provide valuable context-specific insights into individual experiences of security and insecurity.

Cross-Regional Comparisons: Expanding the analysis to include comparisons with other regions facing similar human security challenges could reveal broader patterns and enhance understanding.

Longitudinal Studies: Investigating trends over time will help determine the effectiveness of policies aimed at improving human security and identify shifts in public perception.

Interdisciplinary Approaches: Combining perspectives from political science, sociology, and environmental studies can lead to a more holistic understanding of the factors influencing human security in the region.

Policy Evaluation: Assessing the impact of existing initiatives aimed at enhancing human security will provide critical feedback and inform future interventions.

There is a need for a more comprehensive theoretical framework that draws from the comparative regionalism literature. By integrating insights from different regional contexts, researchers can develop a nuanced understanding of the unique dynamics that shape the regional order in Northeast Asia.

A more in-depth analysis of the normative divergence between China and Japan in governance models is essential. This exploration should consider how differing political ideologies, historical experiences, and cultural values influence their respective approaches to governance and international cooperation.

Subnational diplomacy, data sovereignty, and digital regionalism represent underexplored vectors that could significantly impact regional dynamics. Future research should examine how local governments and non-state actors engage in diplomacy and influence policy-making, particularly in the context of technological advancements and data governance in the region.

Implementing scenario-based foresight and policy simulations is recommended to enhance strategic relevance in understanding Northeast Asia's complexities. This approach can help policymakers visualize potential future scenarios, assess risks, and identify opportunities for cooperation, ultimately contributing to informed decision-making processes.

By focusing on these areas, researchers can contribute to a more robust and comprehensive understanding of regional order in Northeast Asia, fostering constructive dialogue and cooperation among the states involved.

Through these pathways, future research can build on the findings of this study, contributing to a more profound

understanding of human security in Northeast Asia and informing practical policy strategies.

Scenarios

Scenarios are a strategic technique deployed for the sake of thinking outside the box in order to create strategic leaps with the long light on.

In Northeast Asia, several scenarios can be analyzed that have implications for regional security and order. These scenarios often stem from geopolitical dynamics, economic interdependence, historical grievances, and the actions of key state and non-state actors.

Increased tensions on the Korean Peninsula pose a substantial risk to regional stability due to the continuing unpredictability of North Korea's nuclear program and missile tests. The implications include heightened military readiness among South Korea and Japan, increasing the likelihood of miscalculation or conflict. The United States may become more involved as a security guarantor, which could lead to pronounced tensions with China and Russia, who advocate for a reduction in U.S. military presence in the region.

China's assertive regional behavior, characterized by its growing military capabilities and assertive maritime claims in the South China Sea and East China Sea, influences the regional power dynamics. This increased assertiveness may lead to potential conflicts with Japan over territorial disputes, destabilizing alliances and increasing militarization in the region. In response to perceived threats, Japan, South Korea, and the United States may increase their cooperation, potentially leading to an arms race.

Evolving Sino-Russian relations affect the balance of power in Northeast Asia, with the growing partnership between these two countries impacting regional security cooperation and energy resources. This partnership may enhance the regional influence of both China and Russia, potentially challenging the existing order dominated by the U.S. Increased instability could arise if this partnership results in coordinated actions against U.S. interests in the region.

Economic interdependence among Northeast Asian countries is significant, particularly as they seek to enhance trade ties in a changing global economy. Greater economic cooperation may lead to more stable relations among nations, facilitating dialogue on security issues. However, economic reliance on specific countries could create vulnerabilities, especially if trade conflicts arise, such as U.S.-China tensions affecting regional supply chains.

Non-traditional security threats, including climate change, cybersecurity threats, and public health crises, are increasingly shaping the security landscape in Northeast Asia. There may be greater emphasis on cooperative measures for disaster response, climate adaptation, and health security, fostering multilateral dialogues. However, failure to address

these issues collectively could exacerbate tensions as nations prioritize self-protection over shared solutions.

The role of subnational actors and civil society in fostering dialogue and cooperation can serve as a stabilizing force in Northeast Asia. Increased grassroots movements could promote peace initiatives, humanitarian projects, and inter-regional collaboration. Conversely, localized tensions may arise if national governments react negatively to cross-border interactions or if non-state actors challenge state sovereignty.

By analyzing these scenarios and their implications, policymakers in Northeast Asia can better navigate the complexities of regional security and order, ultimately contributing to a more stable and cooperative environment.

Counter-arguments

Engaging in Northeast Asia cooperation with regional powers is complex and often contentious.

Several counterarguments highlight the challenges and drawbacks of such engagement.

Concerns about sovereignty and national interests frequently arise. Nations may fear that deeper integration with regional powers could undermine their sovereignty, leading to reduced autonomy in decision-making. Historical grievances and nationalistic sentiments can exacerbate these concerns, creating resistance to collaboration.

Another counterargument is the risk of economic dependency. Countries may worry that engaging in cooperation could result in excessive reliance on larger powers, particularly China, which might leverage this dependency to exert influence over domestic affairs and foreign policies.

The perception of security threats is also significant. Some nations, especially Japan and South Korea, may regard China's growing military strength and assertiveness as a destabilizing factor. Thus, they might prefer to maintain strong alliances with the United States instead of pursuing closer ties with regional powers. Within this context, the power transition situation in China has far-reaching implications for the regional order. China's rise as a major economic and military power disrupts the existing balance of power, affecting traditional alliances and strategic calculations in Northeast Asia. The implications of this transition include:

- Increased tension in territorial disputes, particularly in the South China Sea and East China Sea, which impacts relations with Japan and South Korea.

- A shift in focus for U.S. strategic interests, as Washington seeks to counterbalance China's influence while

maintaining strong defense commitments to its regional allies. With the U.S. being a critical actor, its strategic interests in Northeast Asia center on maintaining regional stability, deterring North Korean aggression, and managing China's rise. The U.S. military presence in the region serves as a deterrent against potential threats and reassures allies such as Japan and South Korea.

The European Union also plays a growing role and shares concerns about security and economic stability in Northeast Asia. Its engagement typically focuses on trade partnerships, climate issues, and advocating for multilateral approaches to conflict resolution. The EU seeks to promote rules-based governance and economic cooperation but can sometimes be viewed as an external actor with limited influence compared to regional powers. Japan and South Korea, both of which have vested interests in a stable Northeast Asia, are concerned about North Korea's nuclear capabilities and China's assertive posture. Their cooperation with the U.S. is crucial in addressing these shared security concerns, leading to discussions around trilateral dialogues and joint military exercises as a mechanism for managing regional risks.

Russia's role in this context is multifaceted and often contradictory. On one hand, it seeks to deepen ties with China, motivated by shared interests in countering U.S. hegemony and promoting its influence in Northeast Asia. On the other hand, Russia has historical disputes and security concerns regarding China, particularly in regions such as Siberia. Russia's involvement can both complicate and enhance multilateral discussions. It may serve as a stabilizing force by advocating for diplomatic engagement with North Korea or promoting collaborative approaches to shared challenges like energy security. Conversely, its actions could reinforce divisions among Northeast Asian countries as they navigate their relationships with both China and Russia.

Another counterargument against strengthening multilateral governance in Northeast Asia is grounded in the anticipation that U.S. intelligence suggests China may seek to disarm North Korea from a position of strength. Critics argue that relying on China to take the lead in disarming North Korea could undermine the effectiveness of multilateral governance. If China approaches disarmament with its own strategic interests in mind, it may promote a framework that prioritizes its influence over regional stability and security. Furthermore, such a dynamic can complicate the trust-building necessary for effective multilateral governance. Nations in the region may perceive China as acting unilaterally, motivated primarily by its desire to consolidate power rather than genuinely seeking disarmament or the security of its neighbors. This perception could lead to skepticism and reluctance from other regional powers to engage fully in multilateral initiatives, hindering collaborative efforts to address security challenges posed by North Korea.

In essence, the reliance on China, perceived as a self-interested actor, to manage North Korea's nuclear disarmament raises concerns about the potential for these multilateral governance frameworks to be manipulated, thus limiting their effectiveness and legitimacy in the eyes of other stakeholders in Northeast Asia.

Overall, engaging in Northeast Asia cooperation with regional powers faces significant counterarguments rooted in concerns over sovereignty, economic dependency, and security. The dynamics of power transitions, U.S. strategic interests, and shared concerns among Japan, Korea, and China create a complex landscape that shapes institutional strategies and regional cooperation.

Policy Recommendations on Regional Order in Northeast Asia

The European Union has the capacity to play a constructive and stabilizing role in Northeast Asia by actively promoting economic diplomacy. This could involve fostering trade partnerships, supporting technological cooperation, and advancing joint initiatives in renewable energy and sustainable development with the countries in the region. The European Union can leverage its established strengths in sustainability, digital governance, and regulatory standard-setting to encourage best practices and resilience across Northeast Asia. In addition, the European Union should support multilateral platforms, including the East Asia Summit and forums led by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, to facilitate dialogue among regional states on security issues, environmental protection, and economic connectivity. The European Union can also advocate for the consistent application of international norms and legal mechanisms for resolving maritime and territorial disputes, emphasizing adherence to the principles of international law. Furthermore, the European Union can contribute to regional capacity building by providing technical assistance, expertise, and knowledge exchange programs in areas such as infrastructure development, climate adaptation, and the adoption of digital technologies, which will strengthen the resilience of the region against political and economic disruptions.

The United States should focus on reinforcing its security commitments in the region by strengthening conventional deterrence measures and missile defense partnerships with both Japan and South Korea. At the same time, the United States must maintain a flexible and calibrated approach to its engagement with China to prevent unnecessary escalation and maintain regional stability. Effective management of alliances with Japan and South Korea is crucial for coordinating trilateral responses to the

security challenges posed by North Korea, including its nuclear weapons program and ballistic missile developments. In addition to security considerations, the United States can play an important role in fostering economic openness, promoting the exchange of critical technologies, and ensuring the stability and resilience of supply chains for semiconductors, rare-earth elements, and energy. The United States can also exercise diplomatic leadership by supporting multilateral initiatives aimed at denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, resolving territorial disputes peacefully, and addressing cybersecurity threats in a coordinated manner.

China's policy approach in Northeast Asia should balance the pursuit of regional influence with careful restraint in order to maintain stability. China can expand trade, investment, and infrastructure initiatives, including extending projects under the Belt and Road Initiative, to strengthen regional economic integration. Such initiatives should be conducted with transparent governance to reduce suspicion among neighboring countries. China should maintain disciplined and predictable military signaling in contested maritime zones to avoid escalation of tensions with Japan and South Korea. In addition, China can leverage its economic and diplomatic position to promote regional stability through joint projects focused on economic development, environmental cooperation, and crisis communication. Strategically, China should engage constructively with Northeast Asian states to minimize friction and to influence diplomatic outcomes related to North Korea, thereby fostering an environment conducive to regional security.

Japan should pursue policies that address historical grievances while simultaneously building forward-looking regional cooperation. Resolving historical disputes with South Korea through incremental confidence-building measures can help stabilize bilateral relations, thereby creating an environment conducive to enhanced economic collaboration. Japan can strengthen cooperation with both China and South Korea in key areas such as technology development, green energy, and infrastructure projects, while safeguarding its critical economic sectors. In the security domain, Japan should deepen trilateral coordination with the United States and South Korea to deter potential threats from North Korea while carefully managing the strategic challenges posed by China's rise. Japan can also take a leadership role in establishing trilateral platforms for economic and environmental cooperation that are designed to operate independently of historical or territorial disagreements, thereby ensuring continuity of collaborative efforts.

Russia has an opportunity to engage strategically in Northeast Asia by contributing to the security of regional energy supplies and by promoting infrastructure connectivity that links Russia's Far East with Northeast Asian markets. Russia can play a moderating role in regional tensions, particularly in

maritime and airspace domains, while leveraging its relationships with China, North Korea, and South Korea to facilitate dialogue. Economic engagement with the region can focus on energy production, transportation networks, and logistics integration, which would strengthen regional interdependence and create shared incentives for stability. Russia's participation in multilateral forums that address nuclear non-proliferation, crisis management, and environmental protection can enhance predictability and reduce the likelihood of conflict, thereby contributing to a more stable regional order.

This has to be compared to the strategic challenge of Eastern Siberia related to demographics, economic development, security and infrastructural development, something that requires economic diversification, internal development, transport, logistics, and investments in digital technologies better served by a multilateral framework in order not to stoke Russian fears due to the area's vastness and remoteness and hitherto dependency on Chinese outreach and investments. A Colossus on Clay is little worth as a reincarnated Yeti.

Across all actors, there is a shared imperative to develop institutionalized trilateral and multilateral mechanisms that allow economic cooperation to continue independently of historical grievances or political disputes. Economic resilience can be promoted through the diversification of supply chains, joint investment in high-technology industries, and co-financed infrastructure projects, all of which reduce the risk of unilateral disruptions. Establishing clear communication channels and protocols for de-escalation in maritime, cyber, and nuclear incidents is essential for effective crisis management. Emphasis on norms-based governance, including transparency in military activities and adherence to international law, is crucial for long-term stability and the prevention of conflict.

In conclusion, the stability and predictability of Northeast Asia depend on a careful balance among power projection, economic interdependence, and multilateral governance structures. External actors such as the European Union, the United States, and Russia can contribute to this stability by supporting robust trilateral and multilateral frameworks while reinforcing regional economic and technological resilience. Regional actors, including Japan, South Korea, and China, must align their economic, security, and diplomatic strategies to foster cooperative and predictable interactions, thereby establishing a sustainable and stable regional order in Northeast Asia.

Ultimately, the future of Northeast Asia will be shaped not only by the strategic choices of its principal actors but by their capacity to imagine and institutionalize a regional order that transcends rivalry. This requires a shared commitment to procedural legitimacy, mutual restraint,

and the cultivation of trust through sustained dialogue. In a region marked by historical complexity and geopolitical flux, rhetorical elegance must be matched by institutional resolve—only then can Northeast Asia move from precarious equilibrium to enduring peace:

Strengthening Peace and Stability in Northeast Asia: Strategic Approaches

To advance peace and stability in Northeast Asia, the following strategic approaches are recommended:

Diplomatic Engagement

Sustain open channels of communication among regional states and convene regular bilateral and multilateral summits with key stakeholders—including Japan, South Korea, China, and the United States—to address security concerns, economic collaboration, and regional stability.

Economic Cooperation

Promote joint initiatives in infrastructure, technology, and sustainable energy to foster interdependence and reduce the risk of conflict. Strengthen trade relations through mutually beneficial agreements to enhance shared prosperity.

Multilateral Frameworks

Engage actively with regional organizations such as ASEAN and the East Asia Summit to facilitate dialogue on security and economic issues. Establish formal mechanisms for crisis management and conflict resolution to enhance predictability and mutual trust.

Cultural and Social Exchanges

Encourage people-to-people programs, academic collaborations, and youth initiatives to build understanding and empathy. Address historical grievances through joint educational and reconciliation efforts to reinforce long-term stability.

Security Arrangements

Strengthen trilateral security cooperation among the United States, Japan, and South Korea to collectively address North Korean challenges. Enhance transparency in military strategies and operations to reduce misperceptions and build confidence among neighboring states.

Environmental Cooperation

Collaborate on regional environmental issues as a platform for trust-building. Develop joint disaster response frameworks to improve coordination, resilience, and regional cooperation.

Capacity Building and Human Security

Provide technical assistance to strengthen governance, legal frameworks, and institutional capacity. Invest in initiatives that enhance human security, focusing on health, education, and economic stability.

Implementing these strategies in an integrated and coordinated manner can create a more peaceful, stable, and cooperative Northeast Asia, prioritizing shared interests and regional cohesion over competition.

Perspective

Arctic geopolitics increasingly shapes Indo-Pacific security dynamics through great power rivalry, new maritime routes, shifting energy and trade flows and evolving trade patterns. Competition among the US, Russia and China in the Arctic region intensifies their strategic postures and military preparations in the Indo-Pacific. This also applies to the polar regions – there have been two Sino-Russo overflights by strategic bombers near the Aleutian islands and Alaska. A conflagration of weakly governed Arctic and North-East -Asian jitteries could lead to spill-overs between theaters hence have an influence on decisions, alliances and military activities elsewhere, as these powers are actively engaged in both regions.

The situation in Arctic was a factor in the US's decision to launch the Indo-Pacific to contain Russian and Chinese perceived encroachments in both the Pacific and the Arctic on the US. Conversely, closer Russian-China military and technological cooperation in the Arctic can embolden China's assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific and make defense coordination with Moscow more visible throughout Eurasia and the Pacific rim.

Arctic geopolitics test the diplomatic agility of Indo-Pacific states such as the Asean members, by increasing pressures to align with rival great powers, thereby challenging regional unity and policy consistency. Environmental changes and increased Arctic development also contribute to rising sea levels, posing climate security threats to low-lying Indo-Pacific states.

All this changes the assumptions under which the Arctic was built and the problems discussed and the institutionalization of discussions. There is a clear need for stronger environmental governance in the North Pacific and for more flexible governing arrangements to facilitate cooperation, address diverging state interests and ensuring multi-level governance from strategy to implementation, as well to address the needs and the interests of Indigenous Peoples.

Strengthening of governance in North-East Asia and in the Arctic is so to say necessary both to solve challenges, box in the solution of problems, manage global interdependence, and prevent unwarranted geopolitical spill overs to perceive and act on different state relationships,

address the concerns of different economic actors and address different environmental linkages that are Ameriasian and North Pacific—not Euro-Atlantic. The point is this might also provide the conditions for solving one of the few remaining issues of the World War II and assist in managing change in international relations.

If the EU's Indo-Pacific diplomacy in Oceania was a contributing factor in the resumption of trade negotiations between China and the US, perhaps addressing the issues in the North-Eastern parts of the Asia could also help built peace in the polar regions and assuage Russia as well as to let people go about their lives in an easy-going and safe environment.

To forge a meaningful alliance between Northeast Asia and transatlantic powers like the United States and the European Union, several conditionalities must be delicately navigated. Chief among them is the cessation of military overflights next to the Aleutian island chains and Alaskan airspace and surveillance operations that currently inflame regional sensitivities. These aerial maneuvers, while framed as deterrence, often deepen distrust and obstruct the very cooperation they aim to protect. For Washington and Brussels to team up credibly with Northeast Asian actors, especially in multilateral forums, they must signal a willingness to temper hard-power posturing in favor of diplomatic finesse.

Convincing Moscow to abandon its cautious, coordination-only stance requires a shift from transactional diplomacy to trust-building engagement. Russia's hesitancy stems not only from strategic ambiguity but also from a perceived lack of reciprocity in regional initiatives. To draw Moscow into a more proactive role, proposals must emphasize shared stakes—particularly in Arctic stability, energy corridors, and maritime governance—while offering institutional parity and non-intrusive oversight.

Beijing, meanwhile, sees environmental cooperation as the soft underbelly of strategic alignment. Climate resilience, biodiversity protection, and green infrastructure offer politically neutral terrain where rivalries can be suspended, if not softened. By anchoring regional dialogue in ecological imperatives, China hopes to reframe competition as co-responsibility. Thus, the path forward lies not in grand bargains, but in calibrated convergence—where security restraint, ecological diplomacy, and inclusive governance form the scaffolding of a new Northeast Asian compact.

APPENDICES

A. Joint DPRK-US Statement

Joint Statement of President Donald J. Trump of the United States of America and Chairman Kim Jong Un of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the Singapore Summit.

President Donald J. Trump of the United States of America and Chairman Kim Jong Un of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) held a first, historic summit in Singapore on June 12, 2018.

President Trump and Chairman Kim Jong Un conducted a comprehensive, in-depth, and sincere exchange of opinions on the issues related to the establishment of new U.S.-DPRK relations and the building of a lasting and robust peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. President Trump committed to provide security guarantees to the DPRK, and Chairman Kim Jong Un reaffirmed his firm and unwavering commitment to complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Convinced that the establishment of new U.S.-DPRK relations will contribute to the peace and prosperity of the Korean Peninsula and of the world, and recognizing that mutual confidence building can promote the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, President Trump and Chairman Kim Jong Un state the following:

1. The United States and the DPRK commit to establish new U.S.-DPRK relations in accordance with the desire of the peoples of the two countries for peace and prosperity.
2. The United States and the DPRK will join their efforts to build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.
3. Reaffirming the April 27, 2018 Panmunjom Declaration, the DPRK commits to work towards complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.
4. The United States and the DPRK commit to recovering POW/MIA remains, including the immediate repatriation of those already identified.

Having acknowledged that the U.S.-DPRK summit - the first in history - was an epochal event of great significance and overcoming decades of tensions and hostilities between the two countries and for the opening of a new future, President Trump and Chairman Kim Jong Un commit to implement the stipulations in this joint statement fully and expeditiously. The United States and the DPRK commit to hold follow-on negotiations led by the U.S. Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, and a relevant high-level DPRK official, at the earliest possible date, to implement the outcomes of the U.S.-DPRK summit.

President Donald J. Trump of the United States of America and Chairman Kim Jong Un of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea have committed to cooperate for the development of new U.S.-DPRK relations and for the promotion of peace, prosperity, and security of the Korean Peninsula and of the world.

June 12, 2018

Sentosa Island

B.DRAFT TREATY ESTABLISHING THE NORTH-EAST ASIA STABILIZATION FORUM (NEASF)

The Member States of North-East Asia,

Recognizing the importance of promoting peace, security, stability, and sustainable development in the North-East Asia region;

Acknowledging the transnational nature of security, economic, humanitarian, and environmental challenges in the region;

Desiring to enhance cooperation, coordination, and resilience among Member States;

Have agreed as follows:

PART I – GENERAL PROVISIONS

Article 1: Establishment

1. There is hereby established the **North-East Asia Stabilization Forum (NEASF)**, a regional multilateral body for cooperation on stabilization, development, and security.
2. The NEASF shall operate on the principles and objectives set forth in this Treaty.

Article 2: Definitions

For the purposes of this Treaty:

- a. “Member States” means all sovereign countries formally admitted to the NEASF.
- b. “Forum” or “NEASF” refers to the North-East Asia Stabilization Forum.
- c. “Executive Secretariat” means the permanent administrative body responsible for coordination and implementation.
- d. “Technical Committees” means specialized committees established under Article 6.

PART II – PRINCIPLES

Article 3: Guiding Principles

The NEASF shall operate in accordance with the following principles:

1. **Sovereign Equality and Regional Ownership:** Respect for national sovereignty while ensuring collective responsibility for regional stability.
2. **Multilateral Cooperation:** Coordination among Member States, international organizations, civil society, and relevant stakeholders.
3. **Prevention and Resilience:** Focus on crisis prevention, conflict mitigation, and strengthening societal and economic resilience.

4. **Transparency and Accountability:** Decisions, budgets, and activities shall be transparent and subject to oversight.
5. **Inclusivity and Community Participation:** Engagement of local communities, vulnerable groups, and non-state actors in policy development and implementation.
6. **Evidence-Based Policy:** Decision-making shall be guided by research, data, and best practices.

PART III – OBJECTIVES

Article 4: Objectives

The NEASF shall pursue the following objectives:

1. **Conflict Prevention and Security Enhancement:** Reduce the risk of violent conflicts and political instability through early warning and mediation.
2. **Economic Recovery and Integration:** Promote sustainable development, infrastructure rehabilitation, trade facilitation, and regional economic integration.
3. **Humanitarian Support and Social Cohesion:** Provide relief to displaced persons and vulnerable communities and foster reconciliation and cohesion.
4. **Environmental and Climate Resilience:** Address environmental risks, climate hazards, and natural disaster preparedness.
5. **Institutional Capacity Building:** Strengthen governance, regional institutions, and policy coordination mechanisms.

PART IV – INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Article 5: Council of Member States

1. The Council shall serve as the supreme decision-making body of the NEASF.
2. The Council shall:
 - a. Approve policies, programs, and budgets;
 - b. Provide strategic guidance;
 - c. Exercise oversight over all NEASF activities.
3. Each Member State shall be represented by its appointed delegate(s).

Article 6: Executive Secretariat

1. The Executive Secretariat shall manage the daily administration, coordination, and implementation of Council decisions.
2. The Secretariat shall be headed by an Executive Director appointed by the Council for a term determined by the Council.

Article 7: Technical Committees

1. Technical Committees shall be established to provide expert guidance in the areas of:
 - a. Security and Conflict Prevention;
 - b. Economic Development and Trade;
 - c. Humanitarian Assistance and Social Cohesion;
 - d. Environmental Management and Climate Resilience.
2. Committees shall comprise experts from Member States, international organizations, and civil society.

Article 8: Monitoring and Evaluation Unit

1. A Monitoring and Evaluation Unit shall track implementation, assess outcomes, and recommend strategic adjustments.
2. The Unit shall report annually to the Council.

Article 9: Partnership and Collaboration Mechanisms

1. The NEASF shall establish partnerships with international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to support program delivery and resource mobilization.

Article 10: Conflict Early Warning and Mediation Mechanism

1. The Forum shall maintain a cross-border mechanism to detect emerging conflicts and facilitate mediation and rapid response.

Article 11: Funding

1. Funding for the NEASF shall be derived from:
 - a. Contributions by Member States;
 - b. Multilateral and bilateral donors;
 - c. Partnerships with private sector entities and international organizations.
2. All financial activities shall be subject to transparency, reporting, and independent audit.

PART VI – FINAL PROVISIONS

Article 12: Amendments

1. Amendments to this Treaty may be adopted by consensus of the Council of Member States.
2. Amendments shall enter into force according to procedures determined by the Council.

Article 13: Entry into Force

1. This Treaty shall enter into force upon ratification by its Member States.

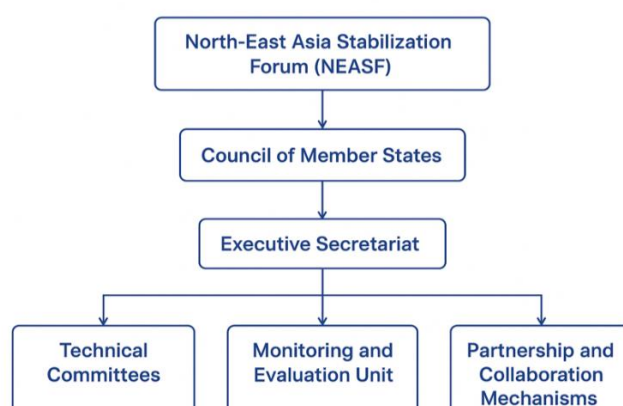
Article 14: Dispute Resolution

1. Disputes regarding interpretation or implementation shall be resolved by the Council through negotiation or, where necessary, mediation.

Article 15: Depository

1. The Executive Secretariat shall act as the depository of this Treaty and maintain records of ratifications, accessions, and amendments.

PART V – FINANCE



C.Draft Peace and Reconciliation between the Republic of Korea and the DPRK

The Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), hereinafter referred to as "the Parties,"

Conscious of the shared history, culture, and identity of the Korean people,

Resolved to end the state of war and to establish a durable peace on the Korean Peninsula in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including the prohibition of the threat or use of force and the peaceful settlement of disputes,

Affirming their respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence, consistent with international law and customary norms governing relations between States,

Determined to prevent conflict by creating effective institutions of dialogue, verification, and governance, and to promote stability through legally binding mechanisms,

Recognizing that reconciliation and lasting peace require comprehensive cooperation in political, economic, humanitarian, cultural, and security fields,

Encouraged by the example of peace achieved through treaties, accords, and agreements between other nations, in accordance with international treaty law,

Committed to resolving all outstanding land and maritime boundary issues exclusively through peaceful means, including negotiation, mediation, and arbitration under international law,

Guided by the aspiration for the eventual peaceful unification of the Korean people, while fully respecting the current sovereignty and political systems of the Parties.

Agree as follows:**Article I: End of Hostilities**

The Parties hereby solemnly declare that the state of war on the Korean Peninsula is formally and irrevocably terminated. The Korean Armistice Agreement of 1953 is superseded and replaced in its entirety by this Treaty of Peace and Reconciliation, which henceforth constitutes the definitive and binding legal framework governing relations between the Parties.

Article II: Sovereignty and Mutual Recognition.

The Parties mutually recognize and reaffirm each other's status as sovereign, independent, and equal states under international law. They undertake a binding commitment to respect fully the principles of sovereign equality and non-interference, pledging to refrain from any form of intervention, direct or indirect, in the political institutions, constitutional order, or domestic affairs of the other. Article III:

Peaceful Relations.

Article III: Renouncement of the Use of Force

The Parties solemnly renounce the use or threat of force in any form, including but not limited to conventional, nuclear, cyber, or hybrid means. They undertake to refrain from any action, direct or indirect, that may endanger the sovereignty, territorial integrity, or political independence of the other. All disputes, controversies, or differences arising between the Parties shall be settled exclusively through peaceful means, in accordance with international law, diplomacy, and established mechanisms of dialogue, negotiation, or arbitration.

Article IV: Land and Maritime Boundaries

The Military Demarcation Line (MDL) and the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) shall remain in place as a buffer until modified by mutual agreement. The DMZ shall gradually be transformed into a Peace and Cooperation Zone with reduced military presence.

Maritime boundaries, including the area known as the Northern Limit Line (NLL) and other contested waters, shall be addressed through a Joint Maritime Commission. Provisional maritime cooperation zones shall be established for fishing, shipping, search and rescue, and environmental protection.

Official maps jointly prepared by the Parties, covering both land and maritime boundaries, shall be attached to Annex I and deposited with the United Nations.

Article V: Demilitarization and Security Guarantees

The Parties shall establish a permanent Joint Border Commission mandated to supervise and verify demilitarization measures, ensure effective mechanisms for incident prevention, and administer the Peace and Cooperation Zone in accordance with mutually agreed protocols. The Parties further undertake that nuclear weapons shall neither be produced, stationed, tested, nor deployed on the Korean Peninsula, thereby affirming their shared commitment to a nuclear-free peninsula and to the preservation of regional and international peace and security.

Article VI: Humanitarian Cooperation

The Parties shall implement programs for family reunification and humanitarian aid, cooperate on food security and public health, and encourage cultural, educational, and sporting exchanges to strengthen ties between peoples.

Article VII: Economic and Developmental Cooperation

The Parties shall actively pursue joint projects in the fields of trade, energy, infrastructure, science, and technology, with the aim of fostering sustainable growth and mutual benefit. To this end, they may establish Special Economic Zones, cross-border development corridors, and other cooperative mechanisms designed to promote shared prosperity, enhance regional connectivity, and contribute to long-term stability on the Korean Peninsula.

Article VIII: Governance and Institutional Dialogue

A Joint Governance Committee shall supervise implementation of this Treaty, review compliance, and coordinate cooperation across sectors.

Regular ministerial dialogues shall be held in the following 22 policy areas:

1. Foreign affairs and diplomacy
2. Comprehensive security dialogue and defence confidence building measures
3. Border management and demilitarization
4. Disarmament and non-proliferation
5. Economic development and trade
6. Infrastructure and transportation
7. Energy and natural resources
8. Science, technology, and innovation
9. Telecommunications and digital cooperation
10. Agriculture and rural development
11. Fisheries and maritime cooperation
12. Environmental protection and climate resilience
13. Public health and medical exchange
14. Education and academic cooperation
15. Culture, language, and heritage preservation
16. Sports and youth exchange
17. Tourism and cross-border travel
18. Labor and workforce mobility
19. Social welfare and humanitarian assistance
20. Justice, law enforcement, and anti-crime cooperation
21. Disaster response and emergency management
22. Unification and long-term inter-Korean relations

An Inter-Korean Ministerial Summit shall be convened biennially, alternating between Seoul and Pyongyang, serving as the principal forum for reviewing the implementation of this Treaty, assessing progress in bilateral cooperation, and establishing joint priorities for future action. Extraordinary sessions may be convened by mutual agreement should circumstances require.

Article IX: International Support

The Parties hereby invite the United Nations, neighboring

states, and relevant international organizations to lend their support to the effective implementation of this Treaty. They further commit to seeking assurances from regional and global stakeholders—including the United States, China, Japan, the European Union, and the Russian Federation—regarding non-interference in the internal affairs of the Parties and full respect for the provisions, objectives, and obligations set forth herein, thereby reinforcing the Treaty's authority, credibility, and durability.

Article X: Path to Peaceful Unification.

The Parties affirm their shared aspiration for the eventual peaceful unification of the Korean people, while fully respecting their present sovereignty, independence, and distinct political systems. To advance this vision, a permanent Inter-Korean Peace Council shall be established as a standing body mandated to promote dialogue, explore long-term pathways toward reconciliation, and recommend practical measures that deepen trust and understanding between the Parties.

Article XI: Implementation and Verification

The implementation of this Treaty shall be entrusted to a Joint Peace Implementation Committee, composed in equal measure of representatives from both Parties. The Committee shall be mandated to monitor compliance with all provisions, facilitate coordination of agreed measures, and address any issues arising in the course of implementation. It shall submit annual reports to the respective governments and, where mutually agreed, transmit such reports to the United Nations and other relevant international bodies, thereby reinforcing transparency and international confidence in the peace process.

ARTICLE XII: DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Any dispute arising out of the interpretation or implementation of this Treaty shall be resolved Exclusively by peaceful means. The Parties shall, in the first instance, seek to resolve such disputes through direct consultations and negotiations within the framework of the Joint Peace Implementation Committee. Should these efforts fail to yield a mutually acceptable solution, the matter may be referred, by agreements of the Parties, to mediation, conciliation, or arbitration. As a measure of last resort, and only with the mutual consent of both Parties, disputes may be submitted to the International Court of Justice or another international body deemed appropriate.

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