

## US-Japan-ROK Nuclear Dialogue Track 2 Statement The Need for Strengthened Trilateral Cooperation

7 February 2012

### Introduction

1. In 2010, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA) Center for the Promotion of Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (CPDNP), and the Asan Institute for Policy Studies joined to form a Track 2 nuclear dialogue between the United States (US), Japan, and the Republic of Korea (ROK). After its first set of meetings, the group issued a statement in May 2011 entitled “Towards a Common Trilateral Approach” which explores the ways in which US-Japan-ROK trilateralism might allow the three countries to strengthen nonproliferation efforts and help create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons, including countering the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s (DPRK) nuclear program as well as China’s increasing assertiveness.

2. This statement is the result of the second set of in-depth, off-the-record discussions among the group—16-17 June 2011 in Seoul, 20-21 September 2011 in Tokyo, and 8-9 December 2011 in Washington—and attempts to focus on three tangible areas of trilateral cooperation: the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit, denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula, and extended deterrence, assurance, and regional security.

3. During the time the group met and worked on this statement, there have been significant developments in the Asia-Pacific region. US-ROK and US-Japan bilateral cooperation has expanded as the Barack Obama administration has intensified its commitment to Asia, and the DPRK has signaled willingness to resume six-party talks, both before and after the death of Kim Jong-il. These positive regional developments provide the context in which the US, Japan, and the ROK must work to improve trilateral cooperation:

- In July 2011, the Foreign Ministers of the US, Japan, and the ROK met in Bali during the ASEAN Regional Forum Ministerial meeting to reaffirm their commitments to trilateral cooperation in the Asia-Pacific and globally, including a discussion of the potential creation of a Trilateral Secretariat to facilitate future engagement.
- On 30 August 2011, the Japanese parliament elected Yoshihiko Noda as the country’s new Prime Minister.
  - On 21 September, Prime Minister Noda met with President Obama in New York to discuss the future of the US-Japan bilateral relationship, reaffirming its importance to both countries’ foreign policy goals.
- On 13 October 2011, ROK President Lee Myung-bak visited the US for a bilateral summit—the first state visit by a ROK President in a decade—in which the two leaders reaffirmed the “Joint Vision for the Alliance” as well as the importance of strong economic ties, which were strengthened by the ratification of the Korea-US Free Trade Agreement.
- On 25 October 2011, US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta met with Japanese Minister of Defense Yasuo Ichikawa in order to re-affirm the importance of the US-Japan alliance, committing to a variety of cooperative bilateral measures, including: advancing the two-plus-two agreement, increasing joint exercises, strengthening cooperative air surveillance, expanding joint use of facilities to improve defense coordination, and communicating over the relocation of the Futenma air base.
- On 28 October 2011, Secretary Panetta met with ROK Minister of Defense Kim Kwan-jin in Seoul, resulting in the release of a joint communiqué affirming the importance of the bilateral security alliance and committing to a series of new bilateral initiatives, including: the establishment of the “Korea-US Integrated

Defense Dialogue”, support for ROK-US Counter-Provocation Plan, the endorsement of the “Extended Deterrence Policy Committee Multi-Year Work Plan,” increased consultations for the ROK-US Security Policy Initiative, and support for a transition of wartime operational control (OPCON) to the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff by December 2015.

- In late July 2011, high-level US and DPRK diplomats met for the first time in nearly two years, and the DPRK signaled its willingness to resume negotiations over its nuclear program, resulting in a flurry of diplomatic activity:
  - On 24 October, the US and the DPRK met in Geneva to discuss the resumption of six-party talks. Although no agreement was reached, both sides were positive about the prospects of future progress.
  - In early November, the ROK’s top nuclear envoy Lim Sung-nam met with his Chinese counterpart Wu Dawei to discuss resumption of the six-party talks.
  - On 1 November, the ROK called for a third meeting with its DPRK counter-parts to follow up two earlier discussions about re-starting multilateral talks.
  - In mid-November, senior officials from the US, Japan, and the ROK held trilateral talks on the sideline of the East Asia Summit to coordinate the way forward on the six-party talks.
- In late October and early November 2011, the Obama administration publicly reaffirmed the importance of the Asia-Pacific, including US alliances and extended deterrence commitments in the region.
  - Secretary Panetta visited several Asian countries, assuring allies such as Japan and the ROK that the US would not only sustain its presence in the region but might also strengthen it, despite domestic budgetary pressures.
  - The US and the ROK increased their joint “tabletop exercises”, described by Secretary Panetta as a “counter-provocation plan” aimed explicitly at the DPRK.
  - In an article in *Foreign Policy*, Secretary of State Clinton argued that the US must increase its involvement and influence in the Asia-Pacific, as it will continue to be the most politically, strategically, and economically important region in the world.
  - President Obama spent eight days in Asia, where he publicly reaffirmed the US commitment to the region, supported the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), announced plans for rotational deployments of US Marines in Australia, and encouraged China to seek rules-based solutions to regional security and territorial disputes.
- On 17 December 2011 Kim Jong-il, leader of the DPRK, passed away, creating great uncertainty in East Asia about the transition of power and potential changes in DPRK policies.

4. Recent developments have strengthened the US-ROK and US-Japan alliances, which constitute the foundation of US extended deterrence in Northeast Asia. However, more work must be done to strengthen trilateral cooperation between the US, Japan, and the ROK in order to more effectively utilize these alliances. As new threats to East Asian security emerge, trilateral cooperation remains crucial for preserving regional, and even global, stability, while at the same time creating the conditions necessary for a world without nuclear weapons.

5. It is important to recognize that the presence of trilateral cooperation does not equate to the absence of obstacles and challenges. Legacy issues linger and current disagreements have several potential stress lines. Effective trilateralism will require each of the three countries to commit to a future-oriented relationship by determining that the advantages of cooperation and harmonization are comparatively more important than any peripheral issues that might otherwise divide them. Japan and the ROK in particular should work to improve cooperation and should consider, among other things, facilitating exchanges of military goods and services and sharing intelligence on the DPRK’s nuclear weapons and missile programs. The possibility for increased trilateral institutionalization exists, but awaits the political will to actualize it. The success of the three countries’ attempts to navigate the waves and currents of trade and monetary policy, maritime security, the protection of sensitive nuclear materials, the DPRK problem, and China’s influence will be the harbinger of the true strength of trilateral cooperation.

### **The Seoul Nuclear Security Summit**

6. In March 2012, Korea will host a Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul. This meeting succeeds the Summit hosted

by President Obama in April 2010 in Washington, where leaders from forty-seven countries and three international organizations acknowledged the importance of nuclear security as the most effective means to prevent terrorists, criminals, and other unauthorized actors from acquiring nuclear materials. The April 2010 Summit featured a communiqué, wherein leaders endorsed President Obama's call for securing the most vulnerable nuclear materials in four years, as well as a more specific work plan and many national commitments. Japan and the ROK have created centers of excellence for nuclear security as part of their national commitments and have hosted various nuclear security-related meetings in 2010 and 2011.

7. The first Nuclear Security Summit succeeded in achieving wider agreement on the urgency of taking action now; the second should help ensure that this action is being taken. However, the meaning of "nuclear security" is in the eyes of the beholder. In the case of the ROK, nuclear security is likely to be measured by how secure the ROK is against a nuclear attack by the North. President Lee extended an invitation to Kim Jong-il to the upcoming Summit, conditioned on the DPRK's return to denuclearization negotiations, but the DPRK declined. Although leaders may wish to issue statements regarding the DPRK on the margins of the 2012 meeting, the Summit itself should focus on securing vulnerable fissile materials and preventing nuclear terrorism.

8. The Seoul Summit may include a few new participants and could also touch upon key topics in nuclear security such as information sharing, guidelines for minimizing use of highly enriched uranium, transportation security, countering nuclear smuggling, nuclear forensics, security culture, security of radiological sources, and treaty ratification.

9. Widespread concern about nuclear safety following the March 2011 accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has prompted Korean officials to consider addressing nuclear safety at the Seoul Summit. The Summit will likely touch upon safety to the extent that it intersects with nuclear security: both have the same objective of protecting people and the environment from unplanned releases of radiation. However, the Seoul Summit should not lose sight of its primary goal: to undergird political will in implementing a robust nuclear security system.

10. The US and the ROK have been working closely to organize the next Summit with Japan's active participation. The three countries represent a full spectrum of capabilities and concerns in the nuclear security arena: the US is a nuclear weapon state with vast amounts of fissile materials but with a mature approach and sophisticated systems to ensure nuclear security; Japan is a non-nuclear weapon state with significant amounts of separated plutonium in its civil sector and a growing appreciation for nuclear security; and the ROK is also a non-nuclear weapon state and fledgling nuclear exporter that possesses little highly enriched uranium or separated plutonium.

11. Given that much of the growth in nuclear energy is occurring in Asia and that countries there will make key decisions about fuel cycle capabilities that could dramatically increase the amount of separated plutonium, the collaboration of the US, Japan, and the ROK is very important. The three countries should take actions such as exploring the viability and proliferation risks of small nuclear reactors and better coordinating counter-proliferation intelligence. The United States has also provided bilateral assistance to the ROK and to Japan for centers for excellence, another potential venue for collaboration. The Seoul Summit may also see trilateral collaboration by Korean and Japanese centers of excellence with a third party in the region—China. Given China's ambitious nuclear plans, such cooperation will be very useful in reducing the safety, security, and proliferation risks of nuclear energy in the region.

### **Denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula**

12. The DPRK nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs not only pose a direct security threat to the US, Japan, and the ROK, but also weaken the global effort to prevent the proliferation of nuclear material and technology. Therefore, it remains essential for the US, Japan, and the ROK to devise a strategy whose long-term goal remains the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The three countries must remain united in this pursuit, while also showing a willingness to make compromises that may be necessary to achieve an effective diplomatic solution. At the same time, a negotiated outcome will require the DPRK to uphold its commitments, which it has not done in the past.

13. Indeed, the US, Japan, and the ROK seem to be embracing this approach. The US met with the DPRK in July and October 2011, hoping to set the stage for renewed six-party talks. Subsequently, the US, Japan, and the ROK met in November to coordinate their approach to the DPRK, recognizing that together they have far greater leverage. Following the death of Kim Jong-il, the three countries remain committed to rejuvenating the six-party talks, which could provide insight into whether and how the DPRK's position has evolved under the leadership of Kim Jong-un.

14. At all stages of negotiations, the US, Japan, and the ROK should coordinate inducements—such as the removal of financial sanctions, assurances against regime change by force, and increased food aid—as well as punishments—which might include additional sanctions, augmentation of the US-ROK alliance, and more forceful military exercises—to maximize their leverage and ensure that the DPRK does not play a particular ally off the others. Both potential costs and benefits should be made explicit so the DPRK knows there are real consequences to failed negotiations.

15. China also has a particularly important role to play in persuading the DPRK to accept denuclearization. Because the DPRK is largely dependent on Chinese food and energy imports as well as transportation links, China is in the best position to influence DPRK behavior. However, thus far, China has been unwilling to wield its leverage as forcefully as is needed. The US, Japan, and the ROK should engage with China in an attempt to coordinate—to the extent possible—policies that are likely to encourage both denuclearization and greater stability on the peninsula. Like the DPRK, China must understand that there are real costs to another round of failed negotiations, both in terms of decreased stability and growing US involvement in regional affairs.

16. Negotiations are not an end in themselves, and the DPRK must demonstrate a serious commitment to denuclearization as the basis for a return to negotiations. Too often, DPRK overtures have been an attempt to buy time for further advancement of its nuclear program. Therefore, the US, Japan, and the ROK should insist that the DPRK reaffirm and show a commitment to implement its existing obligations in the 19 September 2005 and 13 February 2007 Joint Statements prior to the resumption of negotiations. Given the uncertainty surrounding the new DPRK regime, it is all the more important that the DPRK demonstrate that it is serious about denuclearization.

17. While the goal of negotiations must remain verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, there are a number of other issues that could be addressed along the way. The US, Japan, and the ROK must recognize these as essential steps on the path toward denuclearization rather than as an implicit recognition of the DPRK as a nuclear weapon state.

18. For example, it is important that the DPRK's nuclear reactors—including construction practices, radiation shielding systems, and waste disposal sites—be constructed and maintained according to international safety standards. As demonstrated by the Fukushima nuclear disaster, a major accident in the North could have potentially serious consequences for the entire region. The US, Japan, and the ROK might be able to reduce this risk by discussing key shortcomings. Such an effort might have the added advantage of convincing the DPRK to accept International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) assistance, thus reestablishing its relationship with the organization. Safety improvements could also be a step toward denuclearization, as nuclear facilities must be safe before they can be safely removed.

19. The US, Japan, and the ROK should also encourage the DPRK to commit to not increase the size or sophistication of its nuclear program and to end its transfer of sensitive nuclear technologies. These steps, if taken, would help to manage the problem by limiting further proliferation, while also helping to establish the conditions for complete denuclearization. If the DPRK begins to see that the benefits of limiting its nuclear program outweigh the costs, it might, over time, calculate that denuclearization is also in its interest. The DPRK must also understand that it will not achieve fully normalized relations with the US, Japan, and the ROK until it has verifiably denuclearized.

20. While pursuing steps toward denuclearization, the US, Japan, and the ROK should simultaneously sustain their

efforts to deter DPRK provocations through continued US presence, military exercises, and increased trilateral cooperation—all designed to signal to the DPRK that its nuclear capability does not provide it with the leverage to carry out attacks with impunity. However, the three must avoid measures that will further destabilize the peninsula and antagonize other countries, while providing little if any improvement to deterrence of provocations.

21. At the same time, the US, Japan, and the ROK must prepare for possible crisis scenarios. The three countries should devise a coordinated plan for ensuring the security of sensitive nuclear materials, nuclear weapons, and missile platforms in the event that the DPRK regime's demise leads to the loss of effective command and control.

### **Extended Deterrence, Assurance, and Regional Security**

22. The US, Japan, and the ROK all agree on the continued importance of extended deterrence in preserving stability in East Asia. Enhanced trilateral cooperation, including a firm US commitment to extended deterrence, is needed to address continued and emerging security threats. Although there is no single solution to tensions and hostility in East Asia, increased trilateral solidarity raises the perceived costs to those who might try to alter the status quo using military force. To establish the credibility of trilateral deterrence against non-nuclear aggression and provocation by the DPRK, the three countries need to explore responses that are swift, controlled, effective, consequential, and proportional. Demonstrating resolve is an important component of a coordinated strategy to prevent DPRK provocations and to encourage action by China to restrain the DPRK.

23. Furthermore, China's military growth poses important questions for the future of regional extended deterrence. While China continues to qualitatively and quantitatively improve its military forces, its capabilities and intentions remain largely opaque. Moreover, increased Chinese assertiveness regarding long-standing territorial issues, including the South China Sea, mandates trilateral cooperation in devising solutions to rising tensions.

24. The United States can demonstrate its continued commitment to the security of the Asia-Pacific by upgrading its military and political support for key allies and maintaining a forward-deployed presence in the region. Japan and the ROK should make appropriate investments in their own defense as well. Despite domestic pressures on the defense budget, the three must retain their commitment to security in the region. Reductions in American military commitments in the greater Middle East offer an opportunity to reemphasize America's focus on Asia.

25. US officials—most notably Secretary Panetta and Secretary Clinton—have endorsed this policy. In an October 2011 *Foreign Policy* article, Secretary Clinton argued that “in a time of scarce resources, there's no question that we need to invest them wisely where they will yield the biggest returns, which is why the Asia-Pacific represents such a real 21st-century opportunity for us”. Similarly, during his recent visit to Asia, Secretary Panetta promised increased US cooperation with allies, including joint military exercises and political commitments. Panetta emphasized the importance of “coordinated responses” to DPRK provocations, outlining the need for enhanced allied deterrence and cooperative military strategies in the event that deterrence fails. While in Japan, he declared that “the United States is and always will be a Pacific power.” However, these verbal assurances will only be credible if they are backed by tangible actions.

26. The US, Japan, and the ROK must build upon this foundation to solidify and strengthen extended deterrence and regional security, especially in light of potential upcoming leadership transitions in 2012 in several countries, including the US and the ROK. Although the US has pledged to continue and potentially increase its commitment to the Asia Pacific region, enhanced trilateral cooperation is crucial to consolidate these developments and make the regional security architectures effective. Domestic changes will undoubtedly have an impact on the foreign policy orientations of those countries, but the existence of a strong trilateral institutional mechanism will go a long way in tempering potentially excessive changes that may come.

### **Creating the Conditions for a World Without Nuclear Weapons in Northeast Asia**

27. On April 5, 2009, President Obama stated clearly and with conviction that the US seeks “the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons,” and that the US would take concrete steps to bring that world about,

including reducing the role of nuclear weapons in US national security strategy and urging others to do the same.

28. Trilateral cooperation between the US, Japan, and the ROK can help create the conditions for such a goal to be realized. Together, these three countries can work to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula and engage with China. They can also work to establish a Northeast Asian security architecture built around conventional military capabilities with the hope that, in time, such an arrangement might establish the conditions where a world without nuclear weapons would be as safe or safer than one where they are seen as essential.

29. In the 2010 US *Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) Report*, the US promises not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states that are party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations. The DPRK currently falls outside of this definition and thus cannot be a beneficiary of this promise. The three countries should use this policy statement as leverage to encourage the DPRK to denuclearize and come into full compliance with the NPT.

30. The *NPR Report* also states that the US is not prepared to adopt a universal policy that the “sole purpose” of its nuclear weapons arsenal is to deter nuclear attacks on the US and its allies and partners, but will work to establish conditions under which such a policy could be adopted. The US, Japan, and the ROK should work to create such conditions in Northeast Asia by engaging with China and considering ways in which the role of nuclear weapons could be safely reduced.

## Conclusion

31. The Seoul Nuclear Security Summit, denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula, and extended deterrence and assurance are three important areas where enhanced US-Japan-ROK trilateral cooperation can improve security in Asia-Pacific, while simultaneously helping to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons. During the past year, there has been a significant increase in US-Japan and US-ROK bilateral cooperation, but there is still room for stronger trilateral ties and improved Japan-ROK relations. The US, Japan, and the ROK will be in a better position to deal with regional and global challenges if they create a culture of trilateralism based upon mutual respect. This approach should consist of genuine consultation, honest discussions, and most important, actual collaboration, all driven by strong political leaders sharing common objectives.

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