

13th Meeting on Promoting Stability on the Korean Peninsula

Organizer: HD Centre

Participants: 3 representatives from each side (USA, China, Russia)

Date: August 25-26, 2024

Location: Istanbul, Turkey

Background:

The year 2024 has seen escalating tensions on the Korean Peninsula, characterized by a marked increase in military posturing and nuclear capabilities by both the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) and the US-Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea) alliance, which necessitates a proactive and collaborative approach to prevent further escalation and pave the way for stability and peace.

At the start of 2024, tensions on the Korean Peninsula escalated significantly due to a series of aggressive moves by the DPRK. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un declared an abandonment of the unification policy with the ROK and expressed readiness for military engagement, heightening regional security concerns. This, coupled with the DPRK’s constitutional amendments, redrawing of territorial boundaries, and increased military operations, suggests preparation for potential military escalations. Additionally, DPRK has sought to strengthen its relations with Russia, with this resulting in the signing of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement between the two states in June this year. Concurrently, the United States has intensified its military cooperation with South Korea and Japan in response to North Korea’s frequent weapons testing, further complicating the security dynamics in the region.

Moreover, the DPRK’s ongoing development of nuclear weapons and frequent weapons testing underscore a precarious regional security situation. By July 2024, North Korea had engaged in a series of missile tests, including launches of strategic cruise missiles earlier in February and an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) test in July. This year, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol emphasised further that if North Korea’s nuclear threat grows, South Korea would consider building its own nuclear weapons or asking the United States to redeploy them on the Korean Peninsula. This raises concerns about a potential domino effect of nuclear proliferation in Northeast Asia, including in South Korea and Japan.

Despite the deadlock in US-DPRK nuclear negotiations since the Hanoi summit’s failure in 2019, the forthcoming US presidential election in November presents a window of opportunity. Given this opportunity, there is a need to create a positive environment and conditions under which the US and the DPRK can engage in productive bilateral discussions on resolving nuclear issues on the Korean Peninsula.

The immediate challenge lies in preventing **military escalation, further nuclear development, and nuclear proliferation** on the Korean Peninsula. With this in mind, the purpose of this meeting is to facilitate an exchange of perspectives among Russian, Chinese, and US experts to enhance mutual understanding and identify common security interests on the Korean Peninsula.

To achieve this goal, the discussion will focus on two main areas:

- 1. Conflict Prevention and Engagement:** This meeting aims to build a foundation for sustained engagement and conflict prevention. The goal is to develop comprehensive policy recommendations to reduce tensions and prevent conflict on the Korean Peninsula.

- 2. Preventing Further Nuclear Development and Proliferation:** This meeting will focus on exploring policies to address the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula. Due to the complex security dynamics, initiating full denuclearization talks with North Korea is challenging. However, discussions on arms control and nuclear non-proliferation could serve as a viable entry point. These discussions can lead to gradual improvements in relations and trust between the US and DPRK, setting the stage for more substantive negotiations on all nuclear-related issues in the future among regional actors.

Tentative Program:

Arrival: August 24

Participants arriving at dialogue venue

19:00 Informal welcome dinner – for details please see the Logistics Note distributed by HD

Day 1: August 25

Morning – Breakfast (07:00 – 08:30)

09:00 – 10:40 Session 1: Exchange of Views on the Current Regional Security Issues on the Korean Peninsula

09:00 – Welcoming remarks and Introduction

09:20 – Country presentations – one participant from each country is to deliver a short 10-minute intervention summarizing their country’s current view/policy on the DPRK

09:20—Presentation by People’s Republic of China

09:30—Presentation by Russian Federation

09:40—Presentation by the United States of America

09:50—Questions and Clarifications

10:10 – 11:10 Session 2: Discussion on Geopolitical Rivalries and Their Impact on the Peninsula

Recent years have seen significant geopolitical rivalries between the US, China, and Russia, influenced by issues such as the war in Ukraine, international sanctions, trade war and tensions over Taiwan. Discussion will focus on how the relationships between the US, China, and Russia influence the situation on the Korean Peninsula.

Discussion is to tentatively but not exclusively focus on:

1. Impact of geopolitical rivalries between China, Russia and the US on the security situation on the Korean Peninsula
2. Impact of US strengthening its alliances in the Northeast Asian region
3. Implications of the deepening of relations between Russia and DPRK

11:10 – 11:30 Coffee break (20 minutes)

11:30 – 12:30 Session 3: Discussion on Overcoming Current Political Difficulties and Finding Common Ground

Despite ongoing political challenges, the Korean Peninsula presents an opportunity for the great powers—China, the United States, and Russia—to engage in meaningful security cooperation. This session will focus on identifying shared interests and potential areas for collaboration to enhance security on the Korean Peninsula and promote regional stability and peace.

Discussion Questions:

1. To what extent is preventing military conflicts on the Korean Peninsula a shared priority for China, the United States, and Russia?
2. Given the risks associated with nuclear proliferation, how can China, the United States, and Russia collaborate to promote nuclear non-proliferation on the Korean Peninsula?
3. How beneficial is it for China, the United States, and Russia to work together in initiating and supporting US-DPRK talks aimed at resolving nuclear issues on the Korean Peninsula?
4. How important is maintaining regional stability in Northeast Asia for China, the United States, and Russia?

12:30 – 13:30 Lunch

13:30 – 17:30 Session 4: Tabletop Exercise Simulating Military Conflict and Nuclear Crisis

The tabletop exercise (TTX) prepared by HD will simulate a military conflict and a nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula and will seek to extract participant’s views based on a hypothetical but still quite realistic scenario. The participants will receive their packs at the welcoming dinner or at check-in at the hotel, depending on their arrival time, and will be able to familiarize themselves with the context of the exercise ahead of the session.

17:40 End of Day 1

18:30 Dinner

Day 2: August 26

Morning – Breakfast (07:00 – 08:30)

09:00 – 10:00 Session 5: Reflections on TTX discussions

This session aims to take stock of and analyze the outcomes and insights gained from the Tabletop Exercise conducted on the first day. Participants will reflect on the key takeaways, identify any gaps or areas for further discussion, and consider the implications of the TTX for future policy and strategy development.

10:00 – 11:25 Session 6: Roadmap for Implementing Cooperative Measures

The goal of this session is to build on previous discussions by identifying common ground among the positions of China, Russia, and the United States. The goal is to explore collaborative efforts for achieving stability and denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula. Bearing this in mind, the session will focus on mapping out concrete steps to propose actionable recommendations.

Steps to be considered (the full list of steps is to be provided to participants on a separate printout during the meeting):

- Immediate Actions to Reduce Tensions on the Korean Peninsula in terms of CBMs:
What immediate actions can be taken to reduce tensions on the Korean Peninsula?
- Military Conflict Management to Avoid Clashes Between DPRK and ROK:
If we are to establish immediate actions (or small steps) for confidence-building measures on the Korean Peninsula to reduce tensions, what additional actions can the US, China, and Russia each take to avoid clashes on the Korean Peninsula?
- Building a Cohesive Strategy for Engagement with the DPRK:
How can each country contribute to building a cohesive strategy for engagement with the DPRK?
- Longer-Term Cooperation on Regional Security in Northeast Asia:
What steps can be taken to establish longer-term cooperation on regional security in Northeast Asia?
How would each step contribute to regional security cooperation?

11:25 – 11:40 Coffee break (15 minutes)**11:40 – 12:40 Session 7: Finalizing Policy Recommendations**

10:50 – Groups refine their policy recommendations and develop a Framework for Future Engagement

12:40 – 12:50 Concluding Remarks: Final reflections and Commitment to the Next Steps by All Participants

13:00 Lunch (End of Day 2)

List of participants confirmed as of 20 August 2024

People’s Republic of China

LI Nan, Senior Research Fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences’ Institute of American Studies

WU Chunsi, Director of the Institute for International Strategic Studies

ZHANG Tuosheng, Principal Researcher, Grandview Institution

Russian Federation

Maria OSETROVA, Researcher at the Centre for Korean Studies, Institute of China and Contemporary Asia, Russian Academy of Sciences

Georgy TOLORAYA, Director of Asian strategy center at the Institute of Economics of Russian Academy of Sciences

Alexander VORONTSOV, Head of the Department for Korean and Mongolian Studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russia Academy of Sciences

United States of America

Allison HOOKER, Senior Vice President of American Global Strategies

Jenny, TOWN, Senior Fellow at the Stimson Center and the Director of Stimson’s Korea Program and 38 North

Joseph YUN, Senior Advisor to the Asia program at the U.S. Institute of Peace

Observers

Ingebjørg FINNBakk, Adviser, NOREF

Svein Ole SÆTHER, Former Ambassador of the Kingdom of Norway to Turkey, Israel and People’s Republic of China