

Asia Towards Resilient Peace: The Role and Challenges of Diplomacy

The situation since the Hanoi Summit, especially events this month, has served to highlight the challenges of peace diplomacy in Asia.

Sanctions and pressure will remain necessary to demonstrate to the DPRK the price to be paid for breaching international law and obligations. At the same time, there is no alternative to dialogue. If the international community is to reach a fundamental solution and ensure complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization it must walk through the door of dialogue.

The role and challenge of diplomacy is to make this happen. Negotiation processes inevitably face periods of crisis. The need to build trust when promises are and continue to be broken - the need to take risks – to need to build domestic support- all of these factors undermine negotiating processes.

The summits between the United States and the DPRK and the inter-Korean summits and the relationships developed between the respective leaders presents a unique opportunity to take substantive steps towards a peaceful and denuclearized Korean peninsula. Nonetheless, the current situation in US-DPRK relations and in inter-Korean relations shows that a handshake between two powerful men might not always be enough.

Experience from other conflicts shows that multilateral dimension adds resilience to a negotiating process. Bilateral talks are always good. They can create change. They can create a positive dynamic. But bilateral talks can also expose negotiating processes to the mood of the day on both sides. The multilateral system creates a sort of safety net for negotiations to be preserved and protected from the hiccups of the moment.

This was seen in the negotiations leading to the JCPOA with Iran. It was illustrated in one of the EU's first forays into peace building in Asia in the Aceh Peace Process. More recent examples in our own neighbourhood include talks between Serbia and Kosovo.

This is why we believe that complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization of the Korean peninsula can be better achieved within a multilateral framework that has a bilateral component. If the bilateral component is framed in a multilateral context it can help protect the process and can also help the monitoring of any agreement.

Turning to a wider perspective, multilateral processes require a multilateral framework, based on institutions and processes that uphold the international rules based order. Yet, just as the Liberal International Order is needed more than ever as we enter a scarily unpredictable period of history, we see some of the major powers questioning and undermining the pillars on which it has rested.

As so often in its history, the Republic of Korea finds itself juxtaposed between forces questioning the status quo in a manner not necessarily positive for Koreans. In this context the European Union presents itself as a reliable and stable partner. The European Union is a microcosm of a multilateral order in which large and small countries have the confidence that comes from a rules based order to engage in resilient and sustainable process of negotiation to overcome differences and preserve peace.

It should come as no surprise that a key objective in the 2016 EU Global Strategy is to use its experience in voluntary regional governance to promote and support cooperative regional orders worldwide, including in the most divided areas.

The security and prosperity of Europe and Asia are indivisible from each other. Japan, Australia and the Republic of Korea, present at this panel, are vital partners of the European Union in strengthening the international rules based order that has brought up decades of peace and prosperity.

The bilateral negotiating processes concerning the Korean peninsula in 2018 gave great hope of a better future. This is not guaranteed. If we are to ensure the resilience and sustainability of the peace process, the leadership and inspiration of leaders seen last year will need support from multilateral processes. The alternative remains unthinkable.

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