ABSTRACT
The Research Center for Nuclear Weapons Abolition, Nagasaki University (RECNA) published a report entitled, “A Comprehensive Approach toward Northeast Asia-Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (NEA-NWFZ)” in March 2015. Since then, the RECNA has been organizing activities to follow up on its own recommendations. One specific output is the Panel on the Peace and Security of Northeast Asia (PSNA), which was established in November 2016 to facilitate “political processes through timely policy recommendations and public engagement, to create a NEA-NWFZ as part of establishing peace and security in the region.” The panel consists of 17 members from eight countries (Australia, China, Germany, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea, the UK, and the US) with four co-chairs (Morton Halperin, Michael Hamel-Green, Chung-in Moon, and Hiromichi Umbeysahi). PSNA held its kick-off meeting in Nagasaki on 19–21 November 2016. The PSNA held its second meeting in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, on 24–25 June 2017. This report contains three sections: (1) summary of the discussion at the second PSNA meeting, (2) comments from the co-chairs, and (3) updated analysis of the summary of discussion. While the contents of this report are based on PSNA activities, the author alone is responsible for the contents.

Summary of presentations and discussion at the second PSNA (Panel on Peace and Security of Northeast Asia) June 24–25, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

The second meeting of the PSNA took place in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, from June 24 to 25. The meeting was co-hosted by the RECNA and Blue Banner with special cooperation from the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (APLN).

The meeting was held under the Chatham House rule, and thus the following is a summary of presentations and discussions of the meeting. The RECNA, the secretariat of PSNA, is responsible for its contents.

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June 24

Session 1: US nuclear policy and its implications to the security of Northeast Asia

Presentations. There were two presentations on this subject, one from a US perspective and the other from a Russian perspective. First it was noted that the US’ Trump Administration was now placing a high priority on the issue of the DPRK and was reviewing all possible options except the military option, which was considered unacceptable. It was suggested that, while it was not clear whether a new proposal by China and Russia, “freeze (of missile/nuclear tests) to freeze (of joint military exercise),” may work, it could be a good basis for initial dialog. The Russian view was different. It was believed that the US still reserved a nuclear option for the DPRK. Further, it was noted that the introduction of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile system has raised some concern. According to this perspective, while the US, the Republic of Korea (ROK), and Japan are still demanding denuclearization and regime change in the DPRK, Russia believes this is totally unrealistic. Russia believes it is better for US to take an “arms control” approach rather than the total denuclearization of the DPRK.

Discussion. Although the session was on US policy, the discussion was focused on the issue of the DPRK. The participants seemed to agree that military options should be excluded and a diplomatic solution should be pursued. However, there were differences in opinion about the short-term goal of such diplomatic solutions. Some participants argued that arms control is the best we could ask for and that we may have to give up demanding the denuclearization of the DPRK for the time being. Freezing the nuclear programme of the DPRK would be a more realistic condition for starting the dialog. Some also argued that we need to have a long-term vision of denuclearization and a peace treaty should be the ultimate goal. Some argued that the US can accept such a long-term goal but cannot accept the DPRK as a nuclear-weapon state. There seemed to be a consensus that it may take some time for the Trump Administration to formulate its nuclear policy. In the meantime, there was a proposal that a hotline be established between Pyongyang and Washington in order to manage the crisis and to improve transparency.

Session 2: Negotiation of a Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) review process

Presentations. There were two presentations. Both agreed that this (agreement on the negotiation of a legally binding treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons) was a historic achievement, and the contribution of civil society should be noted. The Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, as well as the review process of the NPT, have been stagnating for a long time and making no progress in nuclear disarmament. Therefore, there was a strong desire among non-nuclear-weapon states for a new framework for nuclear disarmament, as the NPT was insufficient to respond to the emerging threat of nuclear weapons. As a result, around two-third of NPT state parties supported the negotiation. It was suggested that the treaty needed to include steps for nuclear-weapon states to eliminate nuclear weapons and threats to use must also be banned. Both agreed that it would not damage the NPT regime and the treaty would provide new norms for international society.
Discussion. All participants seemed to agree that the Prohibition Treaty would not damage the existing global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regimes but rather complement them. In particular, making nuclear weapons illegal is the achievement of Article 6 of NPT. There remained many questions and opinions on the proposed draft of the treaty (editor’s note: the workshop was held immediately after the first draft of the treaty was published). Comments and concerns included (1) its relationships with other treaties, such as the NPT and Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, are not clear; (2) the verification of nuclear disarmament should be included, and role of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) needs to be clarified; (3) the IAEA’s Additional Protocol should be included; and (4) the definitions of some keywords were not clear. Some argued that the draft treaty did not offer anything attractive to nuclear-weapon states. But the majority of the participants agreed that the treaty could provide a good legal framework for future nuclear disarmament. One suggested that the treaty is like a worldwide NWFZ, with the biggest difference being that an NWFZ does not inherently make nuclear weapons illegal, while the proposed treaty would. Its norm-building impacts could be significant. But it was also recognized that it was difficult, if not impossible, for not only nuclear-weapon states but also states which have nuclear weapons stationed in their territories to join the treaty. Some hoped that substantive negotiations for nuclear disarmament would take place in the NPT regime once the Prohibition Treaty was adopted.

June 25

Session 3: Issues for a future NEA-NWFZ treaty

Presentations. There were four presentations. One presentation focused on the NEA-NWFZ Treaty itself. There are several important and unique conditions which NEA-NWFZ must take into account. First, the DPRK is already developing nuclear weapons (or has developed them). Therefore, the verification of nuclear disarmament of the DPRK must be an important component of the treaty. Second, the ROK once pursued its own nuclear-weapon programme (and it may do so again). Third, Japan has accumulated a large amount of plutonium, equivalent to more than 5000 nuclear bombs. Therefore, it was noted that the treaty must have the Additional Protocol as a condition of joining the treaty. In addition, learning from the experiences of Latin America, it is important to establish a regional institution, such as Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC), in Northeast Asia to improve transparency and confidence in civilian nuclear energy programmes. Fourth, given the missile technology development in the region, the treaty should restrict missile technology development for military uses. Fifth, nuclear-weapon states must respect the nuclear-free status of others and provide “negative security assurance (NSA),” and prohibition of attacking civilian nuclear facilities must also be included. Further, non-nuclear weapon states should not allow any state to use their territories for launching nuclear weapons. Last, but not the least, NEA-NWFZ Treaty must include a peace treaty to end the Korean War and prohibition of all kinds of weapons of mass destruction.

Other presentations dealt with more specific regional issues. For Japan, it was emphasized that Article 9 of Japan’s constitution must be maintained and that the establishment of a NEA-NWFZ would play a vital role for that purpose. Concern was
expressed about the Abe administration’s recent security policy. Others gave warnings about possible impacts of THAAD deployment in the ROK, saying its deployment may trigger a worldwide arms race. All seemed to agree that there should be something more comprehensive than just denuclearization. In this context, comprehensive approaches, including NEA-NWFZ, could be a new framework. Still, it was emphasized that the problem of the DPRK is still the largest obstacle. In order to realize a NEA-NWFZ, one view that was emphasized was that it is necessary to build minimum political trust among relevant parties and to coordinate the positions of major states. In essence, it was also emphasized that dependence on nuclear deterrence must be reduced.

Discussion. For a NEA-NWFZ, there was one concrete suggestion. Instead of a “three plus three,” it was suggested that it be based on a “two (the ROK and Japan) plus one (the DRPK) plus three (the US, Russia, and China)” arrangement. This approach would not only be a realistic assessment of the situation but it might also interest the DPRK, which has declared itself a nuclear-weapon state. Then there were several comments on how to give incentives to the DPRK to join a NEA-NWFZ. To do that, it was emphasized that we need to address the DPRK’s threat perception, and first to improve the DPRK’s own security environment. If the DPRK’s security environment improves, the DPRK can become less dependent on nuclear weapons. Further, if the DPRK–West relationship completely normalizes, the DPRK might be willing to denuclearize. However, it was cautioned that it is very unlikely for the DPRK to agree to implement stringent verification measures; thus we may have to try something incrementally. The crucial point, it was argued, is whether we believe the DPRK is willing or capable of gradually reforming and really integrating itself into the international community as a normal country. Therefore, we should create an environment that encourages the DPRK to make a decision in that right direction. In this context, a “freeze” agreement can start with actions that do not need verification. It was emphasized that we have to take some risks in believing the trustworthiness of our counterparts in order to build trust.

There was an interesting discussion on the verification of nuclear disarmament. It was suggested that since verification of nuclear disarmament is difficult, unilateral disarmament initiatives may produce substantial results, noting the example of 1991 US–Russia unilateral nuclear disarmament without any legally binding treaty and verification. Many agreed that the DPRK proposals (for possible dialogue) should be taken more seriously and the US should send signals to the DPRK and other related countries.

Another interesting proposal was to invite other countries beyond six-party countries to break the impasse. Mongolia is certainly a good candidate as it is does not play favourites with one side or the other, so it is able to talk to all of the sides.

The most substantial discussion on the NEA-NWFZ was the relationship between NWFZ and role of extended nuclear deterrence. It was argued that NSAs may remove the necessity of extended nuclear deterrence. However, in the case of South Pacific NWFZ, Australia is a member but maintains its security treaty with the US. But it was stressed that legally binding NSAs would significantly improve regional security and are not inconsistent with the current US–Japan–ROK security alliance. The suggestion was made that the missile issue can be relaxed once the nuclear-weapon issue was resolved.

Finally, it was agreed that the proposed Nuclear Weapon Prohibition Treaty is consistent with NWFZs.
Session 4: Civilian use of nuclear programmes in Northeast Asia

Presentations. There were two presentations. One presentation summarized the current status and future prospects of civilian nuclear programmes in Northeast Asia. Then, five major issues were raised: the safety of nuclear reactors, nuclear terrorism, spent fuel management; the possible expansion of reprocessing programmes; the existing Japanese plutonium stockpile; latent nuclear-weapon capability; and regional cooperation involving the DPRK. The second presentation focused on multilateral cooperation on nuclear fuel cycle activities including low-enriched uranium (LEU) fuel banks, multilateral uranium enrichment cooperation, regional inspection scheme like the ABACC, regional spent fuel management and waste disposal, and international plutonium management. Both analyses suggested that LEU fuel bank may be the best candidate but the risk of proliferation may lie with spent fuel management and plutonium stockpiles.

Discussion. The safety issue of spent fuel pool storage was raised and shifting to dry cask storage was highly recommended. An international repository of nuclear waste (spent fuel) was also discussed but political hurdles were considered still high. Because the international uranium enrichment market is stable and supply is abundant, it was noted that there is no need to build national enrichment capacity. The inflexibility of Japanese nuclear fuel cycle policy was also discussed, and it was noted that the Japanese government had nationalized its reprocessing activities. Mongolia may be an important player as a uranium supplier, but it was noted that it will not accept nuclear waste from foreign countries although it may be technically a good place to bury the waste.

Comments from co-chairs

Comment by Morton H. Halperin

Regretfully, the situation has rapidly deteriorated since the conference was held in Mongolia.

Both the US and the DPRK have hardened their positions. Nonetheless, neither can get what it wants without negotiations and a way must be found to bring the two states to the bargaining table either bilaterally or in a multilateral setting.

The policy of the US government still appears to be in some flux. The US has clearly determined that substantially tougher sanctions are necessary. It is not clear what it hopes to accomplish by imposing the sanctions nor when or under what conditions it would be willing to start rolling the sanctions back.

In the meantime, it will press in every way to tighten the sanctions on the DPRK. It has now succeeded in persuading China and Russia to go along with tougher mandatory sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council (UNSC) and evidently to abide by these new rules and perhaps to enforce sanctions more vigorously. I would not be surprised to see additional American efforts to get the UNSC to impose even more onerous sanctions.

In addition, the United States will press other governments to observe the UNSC sanctions and to go further on their own. It will increase the scope of its own unilateral sanctions including so-called third-party sanctions.
The sanctions activity will be complimented by continued, if not expanded, military exercises and pressure on the ROK to increase its military capability and readiness.

While the administration seems to have moved away from explicitly acknowledging that force is not an option I believe it understands that any military action would have horrendous consequences for the US and, especially for the ROK and Japan. It is not likely to use force except in response to a DPRK use of force. Even then, I do not think the US would initiate the use of nuclear weapons.

The most immediate danger is that the DPRK will fire a nuclear weapon at what it believes to be a staging area for an American or ROK conventional attack on North Korea. If the current tensions continue or escalate there will be pressure to bring American nuclear weapons back to the theater and even for the ROK and Japan to develop their own nuclear capability.

The only alternative is negotiations. First quiet talks to agree on a freeze for a freeze. Then talks to agree on the ultimate goal of the negotiations – which must be a peace regime and denuclearization of the peninsula. Then the hard negotiation of reciprocal steps towards that goal (23 September 2017).

Comment by Emeritus Professor Michael Hamel-Green (PSNA co-chair), Victoria University, Melbourne

Recent developments on the Korean Peninsula, including the reciprocal exchange of nuclear threats between the leaders of North Korea and the US, further North Korean ballistic missile tests of ever-increasing range, including over Japan, and North Korea’s most powerful nuclear weapon test to date (2 September 2017), have greatly alarmed regional Northeast Asian states, the US, and the whole world community. In response, the UNSC on 11 September 2017 unanimously resolved to impose more severe economic sanctions on North Korea, and appealed for a resumption of the Six-Party Talks to resolve the crisis.

The threats from both sides have so far have been made in a context of “deterring” attack by the other side, with North Korea emphasizing its wish to “complete” its capacity for nuclear deterrence of a US attack by acquiring the means for nuclear attack on US territories and mainland, and the US for its part, emphasizing, in President Trump’s September 2017 words to the UN, “if it is forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea.” However, such reliance on “deterrence” provides no assurance against the possibility of nuclear war by accident, miscalculation, pre-emption, or escalation from conventional attacks. One less noticed feature of the recent UNSC Resolution 2375 (2017) North Korea is the quasi-military imposition of naval interdiction of vessels transporting prohibited items from North Korea. Such interdiction carries the risk of naval conflict with obvious escalatory risks. This is in addition to the potential North Korean misperception of exercise drills carried out in close proximity to North Korea. There may also be risks associated with any US military miscalculation that a pre-emptive attack can potentially be launched against North Korea without catastrophic risk to South Koreans, although any detected move to such pre-emption risks triggering a pre-emptive attack by North Korea. Finally, any moves to “destroy North Korea” are likely to risk wider conflict with China, whose own perceived interests would be critically affected by North Korean regime collapse.
The above risks have highlighted the continuing urgency of the diplomatic solutions discussed and proposed at the second PSNA Panel held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, in June 2017. So far there seems to be an assumption on the part of the US and its allies that the combination of sanctions and military threats will, in and of themselves, bring about North Korean denuclearization, or at least induce North Korea into entering into negotiations. However, as noted in the PSNA Panel discussion of the issues, it may be unrealistic to expect North Korea to immediately surrender its nuclear and missile capabilities. Rather, it is important to initiate, without preconditions, a negotiation process that involves a phased process seeking an initial North Korean freeze on its current nuclear and missile testing programmes in return for constraints on exercises close to the North Korean border, and then moving on to the possible elements of a longer-term resolution that addresses all parties’ legitimate security needs. These, as discussed by PSNA, include: agreeing on a Korean War peace treaty; moving towards a regional nuclear weapon free zone; providing security guarantee inducements for North Korea to join such a zone; and offering economic and energy incentives to North Korea as part of a comprehensive agreement.

The Panel also, very importantly, highlighted the importance of countries outside the region playing a mediating role in breaking the current impasse on starting negotiations, identifying Mongolia as one such country. Most recently, the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, has offered to play such a role, citing the process and relative success of the Iranian nuclear agreement (23 September 2017).

Comment by Hiromichi Umebayashi

Since the last PSNA meeting in Ulaanbaatar in June, we have seen significant developments in two facets relating to the meeting’s agenda: one is the rapidly evolving situation around the DPRK and the other is the conclusion and opening for signature of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

As for the situation around the DPRK, the international community witnessed considerable degree of sophistication of its Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM), Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM), and nuclear-warhead capabilities. This may lead to an international public perception that the DPRK has acquired more confidence in its possible status of nuclear armed states and that the denuclearization of Northeast Asia has become very difficult. In this respect, it will be important to reconfirm the long-standing position of the DPRK on its nuclear armament; its nuclear deterrent is the means to defend against the US threat, end the hostile relationship, and achieve normalization with the US. There will be no change in this position, considering the consistency of its history.

On the other hand, it is all the more important to develop a concrete and rolling plan for a comprehensive approach to a NEA-NWFZ on the premise that the DPRK’s nuclear possession will continue for the time being. As long as the end picture of nuclear-weapon-free Northeast Asia is clear and firm, a variety of approaches with intermediate phases should be pursued and explored.

The imminent risk of the war of words slipping down to an actual war has to be controlled and stopped through every possible channel. In particular, the roles of regional states, including the ROK, China, and Japan, are important. Japan’s message, reflecting its nationwide concerns and independent of the US’ Trump Administration, will be effective and is strongly encouraged.
The progress of the treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons will lend force in many ways to advance the efforts to denuclearize Northeast Asia. In the recent ministerial meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the DPRK emphasized its loyalty to the NAM. Many leading states of the NAM are strong advocates of the Prohibition Treaty and thus will strengthen the prohibition norms in the NAM community. This will serve as an impediment against the DPRK’s long-term possession of nuclear weapons. In the ROK and Japan, a NEA-NWFZ is a plain policy alternative to their current security policy that depends on the US extended nuclear deterrence, preventing them from joining the ban treaty. A number of civil society organizations adopt their campaign strategy to press the government along this line for the purpose of attaining its early participation in the ban treaty. In this situation, it is appropriate to note that the argument for the possible co-existence of extended nuclear deterrence with an NWFZ, exemplified in Australia, which bears some merit in persuading conservative sections, will have possible demerits in promoting a NEA-NWFZ (27 September 2017).

Updated analysis of summary of discussion at PSNA

Tatsujiro Suzuki

Since the last meeting of the PSNA held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 24–25 June 2017, there have been significant developments in the Northeast Asia region. This updated analysis is based on the comments received from the co-chairs of PSNA and is to inform the readers about the implications of recent developments and their relevance to PSNA activities.

Deteriorating situations in Northeast Asia: Potential risk of military actions

All three co-chairs pointed out that the situation in the region has been significantly deteriorating, as the DPRK continued its ballistic missile tests and its most powerful nuclear test on September 3, while the US also hardened its position. Both sides put more pressure on the other side by hostile actions and words to deter the other side to take any military actions. However, Prof. Hamel-Green noted that such reliance on deterrence provides no assurance against the possibility of nuclear war by accident, miscalculation, pre-emption, or escalation from conventional attacks.

All three co-chairs agreed that the UNSC Resolution 2375(2017) introduced after the DPRK’s nuclear test needs to be strictly enforced, but Prof. Hamel-Green noted that it includes the “quasi-military imposition of naval interdiction of vessels transporting prohibited items from North Korea,” and warned “such interdiction carries the risk of naval conflict with obvious escalatory risks.” Prof. Hamel-Green also warned that “any moves to ‘destroy North Korea’ are likely to risk wider conflict with China.”

Dr Morton Halperin also stressed the potential risks of possible military actions by either side. He noted “any military action would have horrendous consequences for the US and, especially for the ROK and Japan. . . . And the most immediate danger is that the DPRK will fire a nuclear weapon at what it believes to be a staging area for an American or ROK conventional attack on North Korea.” He further warned that “if the current tensions continue or escalate there will be pressure to bring American nuclear
weapons back to the theater and even for the ROK and Japan to develop their own nuclear capability.”

**Urgency of diplomatic actions: Step by step, but comprehensive approach**

All co-chairs agreed that the only alternative is a diplomatic solution. Diplomacy is more urgently needed now than in June when PSNA had a meeting. What are the possible conditions to have a dialog between the DPRK and the US?

Prof. Hamel-Green noted that it is “unrealistic to expect North Korea immediately surrender its nuclear and missile capabilities,” and proposed that “it is important to initiate, without preconditions, a negotiation process that involves a phased process seeking an initial freeze on its current nuclear and missile testing programmes in return for constraints on exercises close to the North Korean border,” and then moving on to the “possible elements of a longer-term resolution.” Dr Halperin also proposed a similar approach; i.e., “first quiet talks to agree on freeze to freeze, then talks to agree on the ultimate goal of the negotiations.”

Prof. Umebayashi further clarified the goal of the final negotiations. Considering the unchanged position of North Korea, which is “its nuclear deterrent is the means to defend the US threat, end the hostile relationship and achieve normalization with the US,” he re-emphasized the importance of developing a concrete and rolling plan for “a comprehensive approach to a Northeast Asia-Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (NEA-NWFZ) on the premise that the DPRK’s nuclear possessions will continue for the time being.” He also stressed the important roles that regional states can play. In particular, he said that “Japan’s message, reflecting its nation-wide concerns and independent of the US Trump Administration, will be effective and is strongly encouraged.”

**Adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and Northeast Asia**

One positive development made after the PSNA meeting in June was the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in July 2017.

Prof. Umebayashi analysed the implications of the treaty for Northeast Asia. He noted that at a recent ministerial meeting, the DPRK emphasized its loyalty to NAM, which was one of the driving forces of the treaty. Thus, he suggested that “this will serve as an impediment against the DPRK’s long-term possession of nuclear weapons.” On the other hand, for the ROK and Japan, reliance on US nuclear deterrence prevents them from joining the treaty. Thus, he warned that the possible co-existence of extended nuclear deterrence with an NWFZ, exemplified in Australia bears some merits in persuading conservative sections but will have possible demerits in promoting a NEA-NWFZ (1 November 2017).

**Notes on contributor**

*Tatsujiro Suzuki* was born in 1951. He graduated from the University of Tokyo (1975), from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1979) and gained a Ph.D. from the University of Tokyo (1988) in nuclear engineering. He served as Vice Chairman at Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC) from 2010 to 2014. He joined RECNA in 2014 and is now the Director. He has been a Council Member of Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs since 2014.