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Preserving the Long Peace of Asia*

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A long peace in Asia is of critical importance not just for Asia but also for nations across the world. The question is simple, but the answer is complicated: How do we maintain peace and stability in our region? This is not a question of purely academic inquiry. Now, North Korea is the biggest crisis, it has been a crisis long in the making, beginning with the Soviet Union training of nuclear scientists after the World War II and the expelling of International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors in North Korea in 2002. Most recently, North Korea has tested nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, adding to the already complicated challenges facing Northeast Asia security. China has a stake in it. China's interest lies in ensuring a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula and preventing the destruction of peace and security in Northeast Asia. Furthermore, we need to think about what the strategic and diplomatic consequences would be. In my estimation, the risk of a potential arm conflict in North Korea has risen from 5% to 25%. I even see many commentators around the world have now increased their number of estimation approximately to 30% this year. In fact, I believe we are moving to a

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particularly dangerous direction right now, a direction of too much risk. These are dangerous times and therefore require the earnest engagement of all of us.

The uncomfortable truth is that in recent decades the world has been kicking this can down the road. And now everyone is scrambling to work out what to do about it. It's legitimate to say that all regional and global preoccupation now lies with how we should prevent this crisis from developing further. A Chinese friend of mine often reminds me that crisis has its own logic, war has its own logic, and it is of foremost significance to avoid stepping into that crisis in the very first place. From what I see and what I know, we are now on the edge of crisis on the peninsula. So, it is legitimate that we focus on the question, and also focus on how it is that the crisis occurred in our wider region and in a strategic environment which is evolving in recent decades. It is also legitimate to consider how to prevent this area from degenerating into a situation which is broadly violent, not just North Korea. We are on the verge of crisis, and why? A collective security institution is lacking in this area. So far, Asia has failed to establish a united voice, we can no longer simply assume that peace and stability are now given within our region.

The uncomfortable truth is that our wider region has now become an Asian paradox: high levels of pan regional economic integration and unprecedented level of regional prosperity, while accompanied by the continuation and exacerbation of underlying geopolitical threats to security, and unresolved territorial disputes. Apart from North Korea, there are a number of potential sources of instability: territorial disputes, marine competition, increasing strategic competition between India and China, the increasing polarization between China and the U.S., and newly emerging threats, including the return of ISIS fighters from the Middle East which is threatening Southeast Asia, Central Asia and Xinjiang in China. All these highlight a common concern that the belief prevails many years in Asia may not be true, which assumes that regional economic prosperity will eventually result or sufficiently reduce bilateral or multilateral frictions and geopolitical rivalry. We are now heading into a period when despite our common interests, high level of regional trade investment and circulation of people, even high level of education, the countries of Asia are facing a potential conflict.

In 2015, I launched this committee to address this puzzle. We spent 18 months discussing, and this report is the result of the discussions explaining what can be done. It's a serious piece of policy analysis and

policy recommendation. The premise opinion of this report is simple: Asia is facing greater friction and factionalism among different countries; we need to build up a stronger mechanism to bring countries together and prevent instability spiraling into crisis. The problem is we Asian countries are a bit over-complacent since 1975. We assumed that the long peace we are enjoying now is automatically self-sustaining. However, the challenges remind us that this is simply not true. A strong mechanism is missing to bring all of us in, there is not a big enough multilateral table to bring countries in and discuss differences. This requires active management, creative foreign policy, strategy transparency, and substantial security dialogues so finally we can bring nations to the table to deal with long-standing differences including territorial nature.

East Asia Summit (EAS) is the only pan regional leaders meeting in Asia dedicating to political security issue, it was established in 2005. EAS is the best place to start with; it comprises 18 regional countries including China, the US, Russia, India, Japan, Korea, and ASEAN countries. This institution needs to be built into the one which is more effective and operational to focus on crisis management and crisis prevention, to bring greater flexibility for the institution itself.

The report outlines five principles to achieve these goals:

- Strengthen the center. The challenge of the Asian system is to encourage better coordination, states should commit to further strengthening and enhancing the role of the East Asia Summit (EAS) as a leaders-level forum.

- Promote strategic dialogue alongside tactical cooperation. An exclusive focus on these common challenges can perpetuate strategic mistrust, it will be important for nations to also double down on their commitment to free and open dialogue as a means of enhancing trust.

- Get serious about risk management and dispute resolution. One of the greatest threats Asia-Pacific is the risk of inadvertent crisis and/or military escalation. Regional security institutions can play an important function in avoiding such outcomes by developing practical mechanisms.

- Build toward a networked approach. Asia's complex security environment calls for a more fluid and flexible regional security architecture that resembles a network more than a hierarchy.

- Embrace further strengthening of ASEAN. As ASEAN engages in internal deliberations about its future vision and role in the region, external

partners should encourage and help facilitate further strengthening of ASEAN centrality.

Accordingly, some immediate steps should be taken by related countries:

- Establish a High-Level EAS Reform Committee.
- Establish a non-governmental Eminent Persons Group (EPG) to propose concrete regional confidence-building measures.
- Add regional architecture building to leaders' bilateral agendas.
- Strengthen the ASEAN Charter.
- Initiate Track II dialogues on regional principles.

We should take a moment to reflect on the creation of European Union. There are many significant aspects from which we may learn. Europeans finally realized that war is too destructive and new radical institution arrangements are necessary. They kept inventing and creating new things, first the European Coal and Steel Community, then the Common Market, until the European Union today. They resolved their problems as a community of states after century of hatred by doing something differently and paying attention to common interest, just look at the historical reconciliation between France and Germany. Today, the idea that France and German could go to war today is nonsensical, the idea that Britain and German could go to war today is nonsensical. European Union may not be a perfect model to follow, but the EU concept, the inspiration and idea of it, is a model to Asia. The best way to prevent the mistake is to avoid repeating the mistake again, and we should focus on Asia, in order to avoid simple recurrence of history, we hope that our countries can bind together to tackle the deepening security dilemma with a stronger regional security mechanism, here enters our report, and we recommend your serious considerations.

(Transcribed by Jing Danyang)

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