

Explaining the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI)

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The Korean government has dedicated itself to the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI) for the last 2 years however, there seems to be some misconception of what the NAPCI really is.

The NAPCI is a vision as well as a diplomatic strategy to transform the current structure of distrust and confrontation into one of reconciliation and cooperation. The NAPCI is built around trust that can establish a foundation for sustainable peace and prosperity in the region. The initiative represents the multi-lateralization of trustpolitik in Northeast Asia.

Background

The factors that formulate the background of NAPCI are as follows:

First, there is an “Asia Paradox.” Northeast Asia suffers from the Asia Paradox, where deepening economic interdependence is overshadowed by political and security discord. Northeast Asia accounts for 20% of the global economy with ongoing increases in intra-regional trade. However, many regional powers and superpowers persistently become involved in intra-regional conflicts. These circumstances represent the “Return of Geopolitics,” and raise concerns from many different players. Various concepts of security have been raised in recognition of the indivisibility of security in a rapidly changing regional and international environment.

Second, a culture of cooperation has not been established in Northeast Asia due to a trust-deficit among nations. This region is riddled with uncertainty, insecurity, and increased tension consistently, this security dilemma has caused the countries to be reluctant to work together. Therefore, NAPCI emphasizes the culture of cooperation, the customs of dialogue, and the common identity buildup in the region.

Third, we lack a practical mechanism for effective multilateral cooperation needed to deal with inter-state conflicts that come in many different forms and shapes. They can be historical or territorial issues that can simultaneously take the form of newly emerging common threats. Irrespective of the nature of conflicts, a multilateral cooperation mechanism can help solve, or manage conflicts in a way that fully maximizes the potential for the regional development.

Basic Principles

The 6 basic principles of NAPCI are as follows.

First, NAPCI uses a gradual, step-by-step approach. It is a process-oriented initiative that focuses on cultivating a habit of dialogue and cooperation.

Second, it proceeds at a pace comfortable for all participants. It starts with countries that are ready to participate, and in areas where cooperation is relatively easy.

Third, NAPCI complements existing mechanisms for cooperation. It is not in contradiction with current bilateral and multilateral settings. It does not replace the Six-Party Talks, ARF, ASEAN+3, or EAS.

Fourth, it pursues multi-layered and multi-dimensional cooperation. NAPCI seeks a top-down as well as a bottom-up formula where after a certain level of trust accumulates, the political commitment of participating governments can be secured to give the boost to the voluntary wills of civil society.

Fifth, it promotes open dialogue and cooperation. Hence, regional organizations as well as countries outside the region may participate and be welcomed.

Sixth, it enhances participating countries' sense of ownership over the process.

Participation and Agenda

NAPCI begins with the participation of Northeast Asian countries including the Republic of Korea, China, Japan, Russia, DPRK, Mongolia, as well as the United States, which has a strong stake in the

region. However, that is not all. It can be pursued along with other useful platforms such as the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) among Korea, China, and Japan. NAPCI will be able to develop cooperation with regional bodies such as ASEAN or the EU by allowing their participation as observer states.

With regard to the agenda, the cooperation within NAPCI structure will first begin with non-traditional security issues such as nuclear safety, energy security, environment, disaster relief, cyberspace, and transnational crimes. The agenda may later expand to encompass a traditional security agenda through a consensus-based approach.

Current Status and Beyond

Under the spirit of NAPCI, a series of meetings have been held among Northeast Asian countries on non-traditional security issues. Such meetings were held either on the occasion of existing multilateral meetings like NEASPEC in September 2013, Seoul Conference on Cyberspace in October 2013, Gastech Conference and Exhibition in March 2014 or to enhance multilateral cooperation for peace and prosperity in the region.

At the current stage, we need more political impetus and blessings to maintain the momentum of multilateral cooperation. In this regard, the NAPCI Forum to be held in Seoul in late October, 2014 can be a significant occasion to attract wide support from political leaders of each country to this multilateral endeavor.

NAPCI helps participating countries and the region through intra-regional stability and peace. Now is the time to enhance our efforts to achieve peace and cooperation through a joint trust-building process. NAPCI is ready to serve all interested parties.

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