

## **North Korea's Engagement in International Institutions: The Case of the ASEAN Regional Forum**

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Despite a successive increase in the DPRK's engagement with international organizations and institutions since the 1970s, research on North Korean foreign policy largely ignores the role of multilateralism in the DPRK's overall foreign policy conception and thus lacks a sufficient understanding of the country's engagement with the international community through international organizations and institutions. This is all the more surprising given that encouraging the engagement of North Korea into stable structures of cooperation is considered to be among the most pressing tasks in contemporary Northeast Asia. Such an engagement, however, presupposes an understanding of the motives and strategies that lead to North Korean engagement in or disengagement from regional and international organizations and institutions. This paper aims to fill this void in the international literature by scrutinizing an especially significant case of the DPRK's institutionalized engagement with a particular institution: the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Embedded in a broader overview of North Korea's participation with international and regional organizations and institutions at large, this study analyzes the history, structure and organization of the DPRK's engagement with the ARF, aiming to distill the motives, strategies, and patterns of interaction with this significant institution. It reveals that (1) North Korea's decision to join the ARF was mainly due to the organization's loose decision-making procedures, (2) North Korea finds the ARF useful as it provides the country with a venue to interact with other states and (3) North Korea, as a theater state, uses the ARF as a stage on which national role conceptions can be articulated and dramatized.

**Keywords:** North Korea, International Organizations, Regional Institutions, ASEAN Regional Forum, Multilateralism

## I. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Hardly any other country in the contemporary world system has a more negative image than the DPRK, resulting in a unique perception of North Korea as a problem, an antithesis to and outsider of an increasingly globalized world. This image of the DPRK as a “hermit kingdom” has fueled a widespread perception of North Korea as either unable or unwilling to systematically engage with the international community—a view that is particularly prominent with regards to North Korea’s engagement with the international community through international organizations and institutions. Consequently, studies on North Korean foreign policy tend to disregard and/or downplay the role of organizations/institutions and multilateralism in the DPRK’s foreign policy conception,<sup>2</sup> leading one observer to famously label North Korea a “multilateralist nightmare” (Evans 2007: 109-110). However, such claims are—at the very least—challenged by a political reality in which North Korea not only has established diplomatic relations with 164 countries, but also, ever since the 1970s, has significantly expanded its memberships in international and regional organizations and institutions. As of early 2017, North Korea is a member of 63 international governmental organizations<sup>3</sup> and is signatory to 94 multilateral agreements, treaties, and conventions.<sup>4</sup> Critics may argue that it is not the quantity of memberships in organizations and institutions, but the quality of the respective interac-

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1. The author would like to thank the three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.
  2. Notable exceptions in this regard are the respective contributions by Cho (2014), Habib (2013), Kihl (1998), Koh (1995), Pak (2000), Yoo et al. (2008).
  3. This number does not include: cases in which the DPRK withdrew its membership (such as the International Atomic Energy Agency), institutions that have ceased to exist (such as the Six-Party Talk or the Four-Party Talks), or Track-II processes (such as the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue, the Council on Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific, or the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on Security in Northeast Asia).
  4. This number does not include obsolete agreements (such as COMECON), duplicative agreements (such as amendments to existing treaties), or agreements on accession to international or regional organizations.

tions that principally matter. To that end, North Korea has repeatedly frustrated the international community's endeavors to engage the country through international and regional organizations and institutions. For example, the country has decided on numerous occasions to back away from particular agreements or suspend its participation altogether. Nevertheless, North Korea's engagement with the international community through organizations and institutions is much more complex than many observers have suggested. In fact, there are significant variations in the DPRK's ways and means of interacting with international and regional organizations and institutions, ranging from non-compliance and obstruction to an astounding level of cooperation. For instance, North Korean representatives actively engage in many of the U.N. subsidiary organizations, such as UNESCO, where they join in the discussions in working group meetings, deliver addresses at the General conferences, participate in votes and elections, and access and ratify conventions. For example, Habib points out that "North Korea is a willing participant in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)" (Habib 2013: 1), and that Pyongyang has "a record of compliance" (Habib 2014) with its obligations as a party to the UNFCCC. Ultimately, despite North Korea's reputation as a belligerent actor in nuclear diplomacy, the end of the Cold War saw an increase in North Korean interaction with and engagement in a number of security institutions and ad hoc multilateralisms such as the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) process, the Four-Party Talks and the Six-Party Talks, among others.

Understanding those variations is crucial, since the engagement of North Korea into stable structures of regional and international cooperation is among the most pressing challenges and tasks in contemporary Northeast Asia. However, a critical assessment of the (im-)possibilities of such an engagement presupposes an understanding of the motives and strategies underlying North Korea's decision to engage with—or disengage from—international and regional organizations and institutions in the first place. Against that backdrop, this paper evaluates North Korea's interactions with and participation in the sole institutionalized regional security mechanism in East Asia on the Track-I level that brings

together all major actors of the nuclear issue: the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Embedded in a broader overview of North Korea's participation with international and regional organizations and institutions at large, this paper analyzes the history, structure, and organization of the DPRK's engagement with the ARF with the aim of distilling the motives, strategies and patterns of interaction on the part of North Korea. In so doing, the paper develops three major lessons to be learned from North Korea's engagement with the ARF—lessons that bear significance well beyond the single case analyzed here.

## **II. North Korea's Engagement with International Organizations and Institutions: A Brief History**

While the DPRK's first engagement with an international organization preceded the actual founding of the North Korean state, in the beginning, Pyongyang showed a rather hesitant stance with regards to the prospect of engaging with international organizations.<sup>5</sup> Thus, North Korea's foreign relations until the late 1950s were confined to fellow socialist states. Starting in the 1960s, however, both the regional and international political context began to change significantly. Along with the relaxation of U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-Chinese relations in the early 1970s, which created new possibilities for the countries of both global blocs, a major development that paved the way for the DPRK's broader engagement with international organizations was the increasing influence of newly independent countries (NICs) in the arena of world politics. As North Korea actively engaged with the NICs of the Third World (Armstrong 2013: 143; Paik 2015: 497-502),<sup>6</sup> the entry of those NICs into

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5. In 1947, and thus prior to the proclamation of the DPRK in 1948, North Korea joined the World Federation of Trade Unions via the General Federation of Trade Union of Korea. Between 1948 and 1973, North Korea became a member of only six further multilateral intergovernmental organizations.

6. In particular, the DPRK started a diplomatic campaign towards African and Asian nations in the 1960s, normalizing relations with some two dozen new governments, and particularly reaching out to those countries where China had

the U.N. system resulted in a major transformation of the power balance within the world body. Thus, framed by a modification of the broader foreign strategy of the DPRK,<sup>7</sup> international organizations, and particularly the United Nations and its sub-organizations, became a significant component of the DPRK's overall foreign policy conception and strategy. Thanks to the power structure at the U.N. being significantly altered, North Korea was admitted to the World Health Organization (WHO) in May 1973, despite firm opposition from South Korea and its supporters. With its admission to WHO, North Korea not only entered into the U.N. system, but also gained the customary privilege of applying for an observer status at the U.N. (Koh 1995: 48). Indeed, North Korea's application to this effect was approved in July 1973 and the DPRK subsequently established an observer mission at the U.N. headquarters in New York later that same year. Throughout the next couple decades, North Korea's memberships in international organizations gradually increased. Between 1973 and 1989, North Korea joined a total of 19 U.N. bodies in the form of subsidiary organs and specialized agencies, as well as 12 multilateral intergovernmental organizations and a number of INGOs and NGOs (Cho 2014: 38-43). While North Korea's early engagement with the international community was at least partially influenced by its 'legitimacy contest' with the Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea), Pak (2000: 152) aptly points out that North Korean membership in these organizations has been beneficial to the DPRK. For example, North Korea has received \$8.85 million in development funds from the UNDP, which established its office in Pyongyang in 1979 and initiated and supported programs that propped up agricultural and industrial productivity, provided support for the exploration of mineral resources, and promoted exports. Moreover, between 1981 and 1986, UNESCO, to

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already established economic and diplomatic influence (Kihl 1998: 261-262).

7. In general, the 1970s were a decade of unprecedented outward expansion for the DPRK, characterized by an engagement of both the First and Third World and leading to a new global presence for Pyongyang. At the same time, North Korea also initiated a new outreach to the West, predominantly as an effort to develop its economy and expand its foreign ties. Between 1970 and 1980 alone, North Korea established diplomatic relations to as many as 68 countries.

which North Korea became a member in 1974, contributed a total of \$1.4 million for the infrastructure of the DPRK's Institute of Foreign Language facilities.

Following South Korea's democratic transition in the late 1980s, Seoul's new 'northern policy' (*pukpang chǒngch'aek*) not only facilitated the normalization of the ROK's relations with the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and China, but also increased the likelihood of a parallel U.N. membership for the two Koreas. In order to counter these developments, North Korea proposed a 'single-seat membership' of Korea in the U.N. during a meeting of the North and South Korean premier ministers in 1990. However, with the domestic, regional, and international framework conditions once again significantly changing with the end of the Cold War, South Korea's proposal of a parallel membership gained increasing international support. North Korea reacted to these developments with another policy shift, essentially suspending its hitherto preferred objective of both a unilateral membership of the DPRK and a shared 'single-seat membership' between the North and South.<sup>8</sup> On May 27, 1991, North Korea announced its decision to join the U.N. and made a formal application for membership on July 8, 1991. On August 8, 1991, the U.N. Security Council (UNSC) passed UNSC Resolution 702, recommending both Koreas to the U.N. General Assembly (UNGA) for membership. On September 17, 1991, the UNGA admitted both countries under Resolution 46/1. To explain its policy reversal, the DPRK's For-

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8. Although North Korea (reactively) requested its unilateral admission to the U.N. for the first time as early as February 1949—a strategic move to counter South Korea's application a month earlier—the general strategy of the North until 1973 was to object to any form of parallel U.N. membership by North and South Korea, arguing (1) that such a model would perpetuate the division of the two Koreas, (2) that only independent states could become U.N. members and that South Korea failed to meet this qualification and (3) that Korea's U.N. membership would constitute a matter of self-determination, which, in turn, would require a consensus of both sides (Pak 2000: 68). Following North Korea's entry into the U.N. system, Pyongyang significantly altered its position and policy vis-à-vis the world body. In June 1973, as part of a five-point program on Unification, Kim Il Sung proposed that North and South Korea form a confederation and join the U.N. as a single member.

eign Ministry issued a statement, arguing that it had reluctantly joined the world body against its will to resolve a difficult situation that would have been caused by a unilateral U.N. membership by the ROK, and to prevent both a biased debate on unification and the perpetuation of the division of the Korean peninsula (Pak 2000: 73-74).<sup>9</sup>

Following the DPRK's "forced entry" (Kihl 1998: 262) into the U.N. system as a full member, North Korea quickly established relations with most of the successor states of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in the 1990s and many Western European countries in the early 2000s. Moreover, during Kim Dae-jung's and Roh Moo-hyun's presidencies, the ROK actively supported a broader engagement with the DPRK, both bilaterally and via regional and international organizations and institutions. In this context, North Korea once again expanded its engagement with international organizations.

Three interwoven trends and developments characterize North Korea's interaction with international organizations and institutions in the post-Cold War era. They are: (1) its increasing participation with regional organizations and institutions in (North)East Asia, (2) its increasing engagement with security-related initiatives, and (3) its increasing participation in Track-II processes.<sup>10</sup> Since the end of the Cold

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9. This explanation elucidates a number of motives and considerations for North Korea's decision to join the U.N. First, North Korea recognized that the changing regional and international circumstances made a continued rejection of South Korea's membership ever more unlikely. Hence, a unilateral admission of the ROK would have constituted a diplomatic upset and there would have been a real possibility that the DPRK could have been permanently barred from accessing the U.N. as a full member following the South's unilateral admission. This would have increased the risk of international isolation. Second, it is evident that North Korea hoped to be able to use its U.N. membership as a way to promote its own economic development, thereby stabilizing the economic situation in the North during a time of economic hardship. Third, North Korea's decision to apply for membership can also be seen as an attempt to influence future debates on such crucial issues as unification. This speaks to a vital element of the state's involvement in international organizations and institutions: to use them as arenas for influence-seeking policies (Ballbach 2013).

10. It is noteworthy that North Korea did not participate in any regional intergovernmental organization in East Asia until 1987, when Pyongyang

War, North Korea has become a member of eight further regional inter-governmental organizations in East Asia, most recently joining the Asia Pacific Group on Money Laundering as an observer in 2014. This growing engagement with multilateral institutions in East Asia has been paralleled by an increasing participation in multilateral institutions dealing with security-related issues in the region. For instance, North Korea (at times closely) cooperated in the mid-1990s with KEDO, an international consortium that emerged from the bilateral Geneva Agreement between the U.S. and North Korea. Additionally, between 1997 and 1999, North Korea participated in the Four-Party Talks, a multilateral format designed to establish a permanent peace mechanism on the Korean Peninsula by moving beyond the Armistice Agreement that ended active hostilities in 1953. While the four-party process eventually failed, it was intensive and far more frequent than the subsequent six-party process, since the Four-Party Talks met for three preliminary sessions at Columbia University and six formal plenary sessions in Geneva over the course of twenty-one months. In 2000, North Korea joined the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and, between 2003 and 2008, participated in the Six-Party Talks, which was a process designed to solve what has become known as the second nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula. And finally, there has been an increasing engagement of the DPRK in Track-II/Track-1.5 processes dealing with security issues in the region. For instance, North Korea joined the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP) in 1994, the Northeast Asian Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD) in 1993/2002, and the Ulaanbaatar (Northeast Asia Security) Dialogue in 2014, among others. Although North Korea has long rejected the idea of multilateral security cooperation in East Asia, these examples clearly reflect a changing posture towards such an engagement, raising the question: what motivates this altered position? Using the DPRK's participation with the ARF as an exemplary case, this question will be addressed in the chapters that follow.

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entered the International Organization for Marketing Information and Technical Advisory Services for Fishery Products in the Asian and Pacific Region.



### **III. North Korea's Participation in the ASEAN Regional Forum**

Founded in 1993, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) constituted the first regional security cooperation and dialogue platform in East Asia. As the Brunei Air Force Handbook notes, "As a major venue for carrying out ASEAN's objectives of regional harmony and stability, ARF adopted two main objectives: first, to foster constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of common interest and concern and, second, to contribute to efforts towards confidence building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region" (USA International Business Publications 2007: 146). From the outset, its founders have conceptualized the organization as the principal forum for security cooperation in the region. Currently comprised of 27 countries, the ARF is guided by the so-called ASEAN values of consensus, confidence-building and progress at a pace comfortable to all, as well as by ASEAN-style diplomacy, which involves non-interference in the internal affairs of states, non-use of force, pacific settlement of disputes, consensus decision making, and a preference for non-binding and non-legalistic approaches. While the ARF thus displays a low level of institutionalization, consequently setting it apart from European security structures, the institution "is not designed to 'resolve' (...) disputes – i.e. to reach a formal agreement, or to create a formal mechanism to regulate concerned states' actions" (Katsumata 2006: 194). Instead, the ARF seeks to promote peace by using confidence-building measures (CBMs) to establish trust among its members. In other words, the ARF is about "identity-building" and its members hope that "dialogue (...) [will lead] to socialization which, in turn, will lead to the dissipation of conflicts of interests" (Garofano 1999: 78). Regarding its institutional structure, the ARF is characterized by a two-tiered process, and engages in a broad range of Track-I and Track-II initiatives. The most important of the Track-I activities is the annual ARF meeting, held at the foreign ministerial level in conjunction with the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference and chaired by the ASEAN country occupying the rotating chairmanship. This meeting is supported by an annual Senior Officials' Meeting (ARF-SOM). Additionally, the ARF has established two additional sup-

port structures: an Inter-Sessional Support Group (ISG) on Confidence Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy and various Inter-Sessional Meetings (ISMs). These groups are themselves supplemented by specialists who meet in Track-II meetings, like the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD), founded in 1993, and the Council for Security Cooperation in Asia-Pacific (CSCAP), founded in 1994. The ARF also hosts a number of conferences and workshops on a diverse set of issues from disaster management to transnational crime.

### **1. A Brief History of North Korea's Engagement with the ARF**

North Korea first expressed its desire to join the ARF in November 1993 and reaffirmed its aspiration at a visit of then-Vice Foreign Minister Choi Woojin to Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand in July 1995. As discussed above, North Korea's accession to the ARF was embedded in a broader diplomatic outreach of the DPRK to the international community in the early 2000s, both bilaterally and multilaterally. North Korea's ARF membership was supported both by the ROK and by several Southeast Asian nations, who envisioned a more prolific role for the ARF in solving regional conflicts. In March 2000, Thailand's Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan visited Cambodia, a nation with comparably strong links to Pyongyang, and asked Prime Minister Hun Sen to help persuade North Korean leaders to join the ARF. Thailand's initiative was also backed by the Philippines. In a collaborative effort to bring North Korea into the Forum, Cambodia, Thailand, and the Philippines each initiated bilateral meetings with North Korea during the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit in Havana in early June. When North Korea formally applied for membership to the ARF in May 2000, Thailand circulated a letter to all ARF participants in order to obtain formal admission from them (*The Nation*, July 27, 2000). North Korea's application was not, however, accepted without reservations by all of the ARF countries, and Japan, in particular, had concerns.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile,

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11. Though Japan had urged North Korea to join the ARF in the years of its inception, relations between the two nations had deteriorated considerably since that time due to the DPRK's missile launch over Japanese territorial

Thailand and the Philippines' collaborative initiative was motivated predominantly by the aspiration to restore the credibility of ASEAN's leadership role within the Forum, since it had been considerably undermined by the Asian economic crisis. Their eagerness surrounding the initiative was also caused in part by their expectation that the DPRK's participation in the ARF would enhance the quality of the institution's discussion on regional security issues. As the Philippines' Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Domingo Siazon, stated, the DPRK's "entry to the ARF enables the Forum to have more serious dialogue on regional security issues since we will deal with real issues" (*The Strait Times*, July 13, 2000). In line with its general strategy to support the (re-)engagement of the DPRK into regional and international structures of cooperation, North Korea's accession to the ARF was equally supported by South Korea's Kim Dae-jung administration. As will be discussed further below, the ARF's modus operandi, which can hamper discussion of many controversial issues, presented a suitable entry point for Pyongyang. It was in this particular context that the DPRK formally applied for admission to the ARF in May 2000. The application was agreed upon at the ARF-SOM later that month and was unanimously approved at the foreign ministerial meeting in July 2000 in Bangkok. To North Korea, the accession to the ARF constituted the country's first institutionalized participation in an established intergovernmental multilateral security institution in the East Asian region.

Following the outbreak of the second nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula in 2002, some ARF members hoped that North Korea's participation in the ARF could strengthen the institution's role in solving the ongoing nuclear issue and bring about a change in the country's attitude towards multilateral security cooperation in the region. Confronted with a rapidly deteriorating nuclear crisis in late 2002 and early 2003, the Aus-

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waters and the issue of abduction of Japanese nationals. Japan's cautious stance was also in part due to its suspicion that North Korea might not fully recognize the ARF's objectives and respect its principles. Later, Tokyo softened its opposition to North Korea's participation on the grounds that, in the long term, incorporating North Korea into a multilateral security setting was much better for Japan's national security than isolating it.

tralian and Indonesian Foreign Ministers called for the adding of the nuclear issue to the agenda of the upcoming ARF-SOM (Sydney Morning Herald, March 12, 2003). Set against this background, in December 2002, Cambodian Foreign Minister Namhong visited Pyongyang in his role as acting chairman of the ARF, reflecting the hopes (by some member states) of a more proactive role for the institution. This was also expressed in the Chairman's Statement to the ARF-SOM in April 2003:

"The Meeting commended the Cambodian ARF Chair for the efforts made in seeking ways to help defuse tension on the Korean peninsula and stressed the importance of the ARF as a constructive and useful forum to facilitate dialogue among the ARF participating countries with a view to help peacefully solve issues on the Korean peninsula. The efforts made by the Chairman of the 10th ARF testified to the significant progress of the enhanced role of the ARF Chair and of Preventive Diplomacy (...)."

According to Strothmann (2012: 104), the 10th ARF held in 2003 in Phnom Penh was "groundbreaking" due to the institution's handling of North Korea. At the meeting, U.S. Foreign Minister Colin Powell confirmed to the North Korean delegation his interest in multilateral talks. However, the main actors involved still did not want the ARF to play a leading role in addressing the nuclear issue, and instead preferred a more exclusive format for such talks. Following a trilateral meeting between China, North Korea, and the U.S., the regional powers agreed to establish what has become known as the Six-Party Talks, encompassing the U.S., China, North Korea, Russia, South Korea, and Japan. As a result, ASEAN's attempt to strengthen the role of the ARF and to implement the ARF chairman as a mediator and facilitator in the nuclear conflict on the Korea peninsula fell short. ASEAN's members had to accept that the major players were not interested in such a solution and its chairman acknowledged that North Korea, for a direct exertion of influence by the ARF, was "apparently too far away" (Asahi Shimbun, June 19, 2003).

While this acknowledgment points to the limited role of the ARF in directly contributing to a solution of the nuclear issue, the ARF did play what may be described as a 'subsidiary role' in trying to resolve the con-

flict. Above all, the ARF provided a significant additional channel for formal and informal consultations among the Northeast Asian powers – both on the Track-I and Track-II level. Particularly between 2003 and 2008, the ARF became an integral building block in North Korea's negotiation strategy vis-à-vis the regional powers—and vice versa. For instance, when the Six-Party Talks made considerable headway in 2007 and 2008, North Korea's rapprochement with the international community also continued within the framework of the ARF. In 2008, one year before the United States' own accession, North Korea signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), the cornerstone treaty for ASEAN's external relations.<sup>12</sup> Notably, the informal consultations among the Foreign Ministers of the Six-Party Talks on the sidelines of the ARF meeting in 2008 constituted the highest level of diplomatic contact since the Six-Party process was initiated in 2003—and arguably was the most significant contribution of the ARF to the international community's ongoing efforts to defuse the nuclear issue.<sup>13</sup> Following the breakdown of the Six-Party process in late 2008, the ARF served as one of the few remaining channels of institutionalized contact on security issues with the DPRK, thus also playing a crucial role in further familiarizing the DPRK with security-related multilateral structures in East Asia. At the same time, however, following the sharp increase of missile and nuclear testing activities by the DPRK from 2016 onwards, the U.S. increasingly pressured ARF members to minimize their contact with North Korea, and aimed to further isolate Pyongyang. However, since there are no expulsion provisions contained within the ARF Charter, North Korea has continued to participate in a variety of ARF-sponsored activities, and some of the key ARF members are still convinced that the institution's

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12. North Korea's accession to the TAC was the first time the country had joined an accord which includes a regional code of conduct. It was a very unusual step in the DPRK's annals of diplomatic relations, which not only set the stage for further discussion of regional security issues, but ultimately put North Korea a step closer to joining ASEAN's East Asia Summit, an annual gathering that could foster cultural, scientific, and economic exchanges for the DPRK.
  13. The main subject of the exchange of views among the respective Foreign Ministers was the development of a pending verification mechanism to credibly verify the progress of the dismantling of North Korea's nuclear program.

channel of communication with the DPRK should be upheld. For instance, the Philippines have completely rejected the idea of banning North Korea from the ARF, stating that the ASEAN Regional Forum is the only venue where the international community, including Southeast Asian countries, can tell North Korea its concerns over its missile tests and nuclear program, as well as the only venue, aside from the United Nations, where North Korea, South Korea, Japan, China, Russia, the US, the European Union, and ASEAN all sit at the same table to discuss regional security issues (e.g. Philstar Global, August 3, 2017).

**2. The Organization and Structure of North Korea’s Participation with the ARF**

In order to uncover more about both the motives and patterns of the DPRK’s interaction with the ARF, it is helpful to take a closer look at how the participation is structured. Building on available data from the ARF, Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview on the organizational structure of the DPRK’s interaction with the ARF between 2003 and 2014.

Table 1: North Korea’s Participation with the ARF

Time period	Total No. of ARF activities	No. of activities attended by DPRK	DPRK’s participation rate in %	Meetings attended by DPRK
08/2003–07/2004	8	2	25%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ARF SOM, Jogjakarta (05/2004)</li> <li>- 11<sup>th</sup> ARF, Jakarta (07/2004)</li> </ul>
08/2004–07/2005	14	10	71%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seminar on Alternative Development, Kunming (09/2004)</li> <li>- ISG on CBMs, Phnom Penh (10/2004)</li> <li>- ASPC, Beijing (10/2004)</li> <li>- ISG on CBMs, Potsdam (02/2005)</li> <li>- Seminar on Non-Traditional Security Issues, Sanya (03/2005)</li> <li>- ARF DOD, Vientiane (05/2005)</li> <li>- ASPC, Vientiane (05/2005)</li> <li>- ARF SOM, Vientiane (05/2005)</li> <li>- Workshop on Security Perceptions in East Asia, Ulaanbaatar (06/2005)</li> <li>- 12<sup>th</sup> ARF, Vientiane (07/2005)</li> </ul>

Time period	Total No. of ARF activities	No. of activities attended by DPRK	DPRK's participation rate in %	Meetings attended by DPRK
08/2005–07/2006	20	10	50%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 9<sup>th</sup> HDUCIM, Ha Noi (10/2005)</li> <li>- Seminar on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Phnom Penh (11/2005)</li> <li>- ISG on CBMs and PD, Manila (03/2006)</li> <li>- Seminar on Non-Proliferation of WMDs, Singapore (03/2006)</li> <li>- ISM on CT &amp; TNC, Beijing (04/2006)</li> <li>- ARF DOD, Karambunai (05/2006)</li> <li>- ASPC, Karambunai (05/2006)</li> <li>- ARF SOM, Karambunai (05/2006)</li> <li>- ARF DOD, Kuala Lumpur (07/2006)</li> <li>- 13<sup>th</sup> ARF, Kuala Lumpur (07/2006)</li> </ul>
08/2006–07/2007	20	9	45%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Workshop on Cyber Security, New Delhi (09/2006)</li> <li>- Seminar on Prevention &amp; Control of Communicable Diseases, Ha Noi (09/2006)</li> <li>- Workshop on Portable Air Defense Systems &amp; Small Arms, Bangkok (10/2006)</li> <li>- ARF EEP, Manila (02/2007)</li> <li>- ARF Seminar on UN Peacekeeping, New Delhi (04/2007)</li> <li>- ARF ISM on CT &amp; TNC, Singapore (05/2007)</li> <li>- ARF DOD, Manila (05/2007)</li> <li>- ASPC, Manila (05/2007)</li> <li>- ARF SOM, Manila (05/2007)</li> </ul>
08/2007–07/2008	24	12	50%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 14<sup>th</sup> ARF, Manila (08/2007)</li> <li>- Seminar on Narcotics Control, Xi'an City (09/2007)</li> <li>- Seminar on Cyber Terrorism, Busan (10/2007)</li> <li>- ISG on CBMs and PD, Bandar Seri Begawan (11/2007)</li> <li>- Workshop on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Phnom Penh (12/2007)</li> <li>- ARF ISM on CT and TNC, Semarang (02/2008)</li> <li>- Workshop on CBMs and PD in Asia and Europe, Berlin (03/2008)</li> <li>- ARF Exercise on Disaster Relief, Jakarta (05/2008)</li> <li>- ARF DOD, Singapore (05/2008)</li> <li>- ASPC, Singapore (05/2008)</li> <li>- ARF SOM, Singapore (05/2008)</li> <li>- 15<sup>th</sup> ARF, Singapore (07/2008)</li> </ul>
08/2008–07/2009	19	5	26%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ARF EEP, Beijing (11/2008)</li> <li>- Seminar on Disaster Relief Cooperation, Beijing (04/2009)</li> <li>- ASPC, Phuket (05/2009)</li> <li>- ARF SOM, May, Phuket (05/2009)</li> <li>- 16<sup>th</sup> ARF, Phuket (07/2009)</li> </ul>

Time period	Total No. of ARF activities	No. of activities attended by DPRK	DPRK's participation rate in %	Meetings attended by DPRK
08/2009–07/2010	19	8	42%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ARF EEP, Bali (12/2009)</li> <li>- ARF Peacekeeping Experts' Meeting, Bangkok (03/2010)</li> <li>- ARF ISG on CBMs and PD, Nha Trang (03/2010)</li> <li>- ARF DOD, Da Nang (05/2010)</li> <li>- ARF Security Policy Conference, Da Nang (05/2010)</li> <li>- ARF SOM, Quang Nam (05/2010)</li> <li>- ISM on NPD, Singapore (07/2010)</li> <li>- 17<sup>th</sup> ARF, Ha Noi (07/2010)</li> </ul>
08/2010–07/2011	23	5	22%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seminar on International Disaster Relief by Armed Forces, Beijing (08/2010)</li> <li>- ARF ISM on DR, Bangkok (09/2010)</li> <li>- ARF ISM on CT and TNC, Kuala Lumpur (05/2011)</li> <li>- ARF SOM, Surabaya (06/2011)</li> <li>- 18<sup>th</sup> ARF, Bali (07/2011)</li> </ul>
08/2011–07/2012	19	5	26%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Workshop on CBMs and PD in Asia and Europe, Berlin (11/2011)</li> <li>- ARF ISG on CBMs and PD, Phnom Penh (12/2011)</li> <li>- ARF EEP (02/2012)</li> <li>- ARF SOM, Phnom Penh (05/2012)</li> <li>- 19<sup>th</sup> ARF, Phnom Penh (07/2012)</li> </ul>
08/2012–07/2013	24	5	21%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ARF DOD, Shanghai (04/2013)</li> <li>- ARF DOD, Bandar Seri Begawan (05/2013)</li> <li>- ARF Security Policy Conference, Bandar Seri Begawan (05/2013)</li> <li>- ARF SOM, Bandar Seri Begawan (05/2013)</li> <li>- 20<sup>th</sup> ARF, Bandar Seri Begawan (07/2013)</li> </ul>
08/2013–07/2014	22	3	14%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ARF Peacekeeping Experts' Meeting, Beijing (10/2013)</li> <li>- ARF ISG on CBMs and PD, Yangon (12/2013)</li> <li>- ARF DOD, Yangon (12/2013)</li> </ul>

Source: Compiled by Author, based on data from the ASEAN Regional Forum

As the table above shows, North Korean officials participated in a wide range of ARF-sponsored activities and meetings following its accession in 2000. Between 2003 and 2014, the DPRK's average participation rate with the ARF—the percentage of meetings attended by the DPRK in relation to the total number of ARF-sponsored activities—was just slightly below 35%. While North Korea participated at a fairly high rate in the early years following its accession to the ARF, this rate



decreased in later years. As Table 1 illustrates, North Korea's participation rate reached its highest levels between 2004 and 2008—during the years of the Six-Party Talks process—while it decreased after the dissolution of the Six-Party talks. The decreasing participation rate since 2008 should not, however, be equated with an increasing disinterest in the institution on the part of the DPRK *per se*. Rather, the available data suggests a change in the structure of North Korea's participation with the ARF. Most importantly, since 2008, North Korea has focused primarily on institutionalized channels of interaction on a higher diplomatic level, as opposed to one-off workshops or consultations on a lower diplomatic level. While Pyongyang has continued to attend the Foreign Minister meetings as well as the ARF-SOM and, to a lesser degree, the ISGs, ISMs, and DODs, its participation in EEPs, ASPCs, and particularly ARF-sponsored Workshops has sharply decreased. Between 2002 and 2014, North Korea attended all ARF Foreign Minister Meetings, ten ARF-SOMs, seven ISGs, six ISMs, six ASPCs, seven DODs, three EEPs, one joint exercise, two peace-keeping meetings, and a total of 18 ARF-sponsored workshops.

The DPRK's participation in the annual Foreign Minister Meeting is the most high-ranking level of interaction with the ARF. While Pyongyang does not always dispatch its Foreign Minister, North Korean officials have participated in every ARF Foreign Minister meeting since joining the institution in 2000. The ARF Ministerial meetings consist of plenary and retreat sessions, where Foreign Ministry officials can discuss global and regional security issues. North Korean representatives often, but not always, have used the Ministerial Meetings as a way to address foreign representatives in the form of formal statements. The results of the Foreign Ministers' consultations are published in the form of a 'Chairman's Statement,' which, as the sole official text, provides information on the work of the ARF. North Korea's nuclear and missile programs have constituted a recurring point on the agenda of Foreign Ministers' meetings. In fact, ever since the outbreak of the second nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula, North Korea's nuclear endeavors have been addressed in every Chairman's Statement to some degree, reflecting the aspiration of certain ARF members to have the institution take a

more proactive role in the attempts to solve the nuclear issue. For instance, the Chairman's Statement published in the context of the 10th ARF, held in June 2003 in Cambodia, explicitly refers to the ARF's "useful and constructive role (...) to help ease tensions on the Korean Peninsula." On the other hand, the Statements also reflect the constrained capabilities of the ARF to play a leading institutional role in resolving this challenge. As such, the Statements habitually verbalize the reservations of the member states regarding North Korea's nuclear endeavors, calling upon Pyongyang to restrain from provocative measures and demanding from its members a promise to adhere to a peaceful solution to the conflict. In some instances, North Korea has been successful in including its own point of view in the Chairman's Statement, as exemplified by the Chairman's Statement released in the context of the 16th ARF held in Bangkok in July 2009:

"The DPRK did not recognize and totally rejected the UNSC Resolution 1874 which has been adopted at the instigation of the United States. The DPRK briefed the Meeting of the fact that the ongoing aggravated situation on the Korean Peninsula is the product of the hostile policy of the United States against her, and stated that the Six-Party Talks have already come to an end, with the strong emphasis on the unique and specific security environment on the Korean Peninsula which lies in its continued division and presence of US military troops for over half a century to date in South Korea, since this factor is vital to consider and address the question of the Korean Peninsula.

Similarly, when concerns were raised with respect to North Korea's uranium enrichment activities at the 18th ARF held in July 2011, DPRK officials used the Chairman's Statement to reiterate "that their uranium enrichment activities are an exercise of its legitimate right of a sovereign state for peaceful purposes."

The Ministerial Meetings are supported by the annual Senior Officials' Meeting (ARF-SOM). Since 2003, North Korean officials have participated in every AFR-SOM. Usually held shortly before the Foreign Ministers' Meeting, the ARF-SOM filters and discusses the promising initiatives of the Track-II initiatives (such as the CSCAP) that are princi-

pally able to reach consensus. At the same time, the ARF-SOM also serves as an independent space for the exchange of opinions on current (security) political problems on a significant diplomatic level—as the delegations are usually led by the directors of the foreign ministries or their Asia-Pacific departments. The outcomes of the ARF-SOMs are typically written up in a Summary Report that combines a recapitulation of the outcomes of other ARF initiatives (such as the DOD or ISG meetings) with a discussion of the ARF's future direction, the preparation of upcoming ARF initiatives, and an exchange of views on regional security issues. While the developments on the Korean peninsula are frequently addressed in those Summary Reports and broad recommendations are offered to the involved parties, the wording is carefully calibrated and usually remains vague, restraining from open critique. For instance, the Summary Report of the ARF-SOM held in Bandar Seri Begawan in May 2013 simply “expresses concerns on the developments in the Korean Peninsula,” calling “for the enduring peace and stability in the region.” The reports also reflect the dissent among the member states by frequently adopting such formulations as “[m]ost participants (...) urged North Korea to abide by its obligations under the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and its commitments under the 2005 Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks.” North Korea has also frequently used the venue of the ARF-SOM and the publication of the ARF-SOM's Summary Report to convey its own opinion on regional matters and to brief the other member states on issues it deems important. For instance, the ARF-SOM in Thailand (May 2009) provided the first opportunity for North Korea to inform the other members of its missile launch earlier that month, as is expressed in the respective Summary Report:

“The DPRK briefed the Meeting on its satellite launch on 5 May 2009, stressing that it had a sovereign right to do so, and stated that it had been compelled to make a decisive decision not to attend the Six-Party Talks any longer in view of the recent adoption of a Presidential Statement by the United Nations Security Council which it perceives as affecting its sovereignty.”

The ARF's Intersessional Group on Confidence-Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy (ISG-CBM/PD) constitutes the core ARF inter-sessional activity on the Track-I level, acting as a clearinghouse and catalyst for proposals on CBMs and PD. Representing the third tier of the pyramid of ARF activities at the intergovernmental level, the ISG-CBM/PD aims "to address (...) a dialogue on security perceptions and defence policy papers" (Leifner 1996: 42). North Korean officials participated for the first time in the ISG meeting in Kuala Lumpur on April 18-20, 2001. The DPRK's participation was cordially welcomed by the other delegations, who described the attendance of the DPRK at this ISG meeting as a significant step towards strengthening the ARF process and advancing the cause of regional peace and security. Between November 2000 and April 2016, the DPRK participated in 11 of the 31 ISG-CBM meetings, repeatedly using this particular venue to address other ARF members both via formal statements and informal consultations. For instance, following its first public declaration of possession of nuclear weapons in February 2005 and its subsequent decision to withdraw from the Six-Party Talks, North Korean officials used the ISG-CBM/PD meeting in Germany to provide a broader context to this announcement through a formal statement by the DPRK's Head of Delegation. Similarly, in December 2011, the DPRK used the ISG-CBM/PD meeting in Phnom Penh to express its commitment to return to the stalled Six-Party Talks without any preconditions.

Besides these three top-tier venues, North Korean officials have repeatedly attended the various ISM meetings of the ARF, the objective of which is "to deal with cooperative activities, including peacekeeping and search-and-rescue coordination" (Leifner 1996: 42). Interaction among defense officials alongside diplomats is also an established ARF practice. The Defence Officials' Dialogues, currently convened at least three times per year, aim to exchange views and information on the member states' respective defense policies and to review their political-military and defense dialogues, high-level defense contacts, joint training, and personnel exchanges with fellow ARF participants.<sup>14</sup> On a

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14. ARF: Co-Chairmen's Summary Report of the Meetings of the ARF Intersessional Support Group on Confidence-Building Measures, pp. 1-2.

total of seven occasions between 2002 and 2014, North Korean officials attended the ARF-DOD. Much like other ARF dialogue processes, ARF-DODs are venues for regular discussions and exchanges of views on regional and international situations as well as on the common security issues facing the ARF and proposals on measures that might increase the effectiveness of security and defense cooperation among ARF members.<sup>15</sup> Another noteworthy form of North Korean interaction with the ARF is via the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP), a Track-II mechanism organized for the purpose of providing a structured process for regional confidence building and security cooperation among countries and territories in the Asia Pacific region. Established in 1992, North Korea joined the CSCAP in 1994, thus preceding its actual cooperation with the ARF. North Korea participates with the CSCAP via the 'Institute for Disarmament and Peace,' thus constituting another dialogue channel with the international community to convey its own standpoint regarding the various conflicts with the international community. For instance, the CSCAP meeting in 2003 provided one of the few chances for the DPRK to clarify its own perspective on the escalating conflict surrounding the nuclear issue. On the other hand, the immediate influence of the central government on the member committee is overtly apparent, as North Korean delegates usually only convey the official position of Pyongyang, and do not submit new proposals. Another notable aspect of North Korea's activities within the ARF is its involvement in the publication of the Annual Security Outlook (ASO).

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15. Since 2005, an annual ARF Security Policy Conference (ASPC) is also held on the margins of the SOM. North Korea attended ASPC 6 times. On specific issues of interest, ARF has established annual inter-sessional meetings (ISMs), e.g. on Counter-Terrorism and Trans-National Crime (CTTC), Maritime Security (MS), Disaster Relief and Non-Proliferation (DRNP) and Disarmament (DA). Moreover, the ARF organizes a number of periodic activities with a view to addressing non-traditional, trans-boundary issues such as terrorism, trans-national organized crime, maritime security, natural disaster management, and peacekeeping while continuing the basic objective of promoting confidence building and mutual trust in the Asia-Pacific. These efforts are in the form of capacity building activities, information exchange, sharing of experiences/best practices, exercises, etc.

Ever since 2000, ARF members are, on a voluntary basis, encouraged to provide reports in the form of an ASO in order “to promote transparency, mutual understanding and trust as well as facilitate the exchange of views among ARF members.” The basic objective of the ASO is thus to generate a better understanding of the security perceptions of other member states, as each chapter provides information on the respective member states’ a) security perceptions, b) contributions to regional stability, and c) national defense budget. By providing indications with regards to the hierarchy of importance and imminence that the state assigns to what the government perceives to be threats to the security of the country and of the region, the ASO offers helpful insights into the security perceptions, strategic outlook, and intentions, as well as the foreign and security policies, of the member states. While the ASO is generally formulated in a diplomatic undertone, North Korea frequently deviates from this standard by rather plainly describing the central antagonisms and perceived threats. Given that other authoritarian ruled member states of the ARF, such as Laos or Myanmar, have great reservations regarding the ASO, North Korea’s regular publication of it can be regarded as a significant contribution. Following its accession to the ARF, the DPRK prepared its first ASO in 2001, and, until 2017, has contributed to the annual ASO regularly (apart from 2005, 2006 and 2014). Aiming to depict its own perspective on the regional security situation in East Asia, North Korea—unsurprisingly—focuses primarily on the security situation on the Korean peninsula. The ASO 2007 constituted a qualitative change in this regard, as North Korea not only provided a depiction of the security situation in East Asia and Korea, but also included specific policy initiatives and potential solutions in a more detailed manner than before.

### ***3. Evaluating North Korea’s Participation with the ARF: Three Lessons***

The discussion thus far has allowed for a critical evaluation and some instructive results regarding North Korea’s participation with the ARF. These results are presented in the form of three major lessons that can be drawn from the particular case in point.

## The Suitability of ARF's Institutional Design

North Korea's accession to the ARF was significant, as its diplomatic activities in international organizations and institutions before 2000 have been largely confined to the United Nations and its sub-organizations. In particular, North Korea long rejected to participate in multilateral institutions focusing on security issues. While North Korea still holds a skeptical view with regards to multilateral security institutions, ARF's low degree of institutionalization warrants two important premises regarding the DPRK's participation in international organizations and institutions: the principle of non-interference in internal affairs and the adherence to a strict consensus system, as this system of proceeding complicates and at times even prevents controversial issues from being discussed. Ironically, while ASEAN's principles of non-interference and consensus decision-making served as a crucial factor in North Korea's decision to enter the ARF, those very same principles also prevented the Forum from earnestly addressing contentious issues. On numerous occasions, the U.S., Japan, and South Korea raised the issues of DPRK's missile and nuclear programs, but extensive discussions have not always been pursued due to ASEAN's reluctance to provoke Pyongyang. As such it can be said that North Korea gained full benefits from incorporating itself into the ARF, whose operation under the ASEAN's rule of consensus decision-making allows for exchanges 'on an equal footing'—a particularly prominent demand of the DPRK.

## The ARF as a Bridge

Arguably the most important factor driving North Korea's manifold interactions with the ARF is the facilitation of both formal consultations and informal sideline talks among the involved Foreign Ministers and their officials. Comprised of plenary and retreat sessions, the Ministerial Meetings have been used regularly for informal diplomacy, often bridging the gap among states lacking formal diplomatic relations. In this context, it is important to bear in mind that the DPRK's entry to the ARF was paralleled by speculations about a personal meeting between U.S.

Foreign Minister Albright and her North Korean counterpart Paek Nam Sun, which, when it occurred, represented the highest level of diplomatic contact between the two countries. In their bilateral gathering, Albright and Paek agreed to launch normalization talks, which, in turn, led to more in-depth diplomatic exchanges between the two countries in the following months, and, most notably, the visit of a North Korean envoy to Washington and Albright's trip to Pyongyang in October that year. Strothmann (2012: 104) calls the realization of this meeting a "feature of performance (*Leistungsmerkmal*) of the ARF," for it displays how this multilateral forum enabled a face-to-face contact that could have been hardly realized on a bilateral footing at that time. To North Korea, the ARF thus serves as a bridge which simultaneously enables consultations to countries with which the DPRK has no formal diplomatic relations, such as the U.S., Japan, and South Korea, and provides an additional (and cost-saving)<sup>16</sup> channel to other states, such as China and Russia. At the 7th ARF in Bangkok, the first ARF meeting attended by the DPRK, the North Korean delegation participated in a number of informal bilateral meetings right after the arrival of its delegation, including consultations between DPRK Foreign Minister Paek Nam Sun and his South Korean counterpart, Lee Jung-bin (London Daily Telegraph, July 25, 2000). The same ARF meeting also saw bilateral consultations between Paek Nam Sun and Japanese Foreign Minister Kono Yohei. This meeting not only constituted the first-ever foreign ministerial meeting between the two countries, but also eventually paved the way for

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16. While it is beyond the scope of this study to address this point in detail, it is important to acknowledge that economic considerations do have an immediate impact on North Korea's interaction with regional and international organizations and institutions. Especially on the Track-II level, North Korea's participation often depends on external funding, which, in turn, influences further aspects such as the size of the delegation. Moreover, given that ARF meetings are held all throughout East Asia, including countries in which North Korea does not have an embassy, it seems convincing to say that financial aspects have to be considered important, if only on the level below senior officials. In turn, this makes the existing patterns of interaction all the more significant, as it can be assumed that they are a result of a conscious prioritization of the central initiatives North Korea deems important.



the resumption of the previously suspended normalization talks between Pyongyang and Tokyo. One Japanese official later stated that “it would be unlikely that Japan and North Korea could hold a foreign ministerial meeting if the ARF did not exist, since it was hardly expected that Japan’s Foreign Minister would visit Pyongyang at that time” (Takeshi 2005: 477). Hence, the ARF has repeatedly provided opportunities for bilateral meetings both at the foreign-minister level and below, which might otherwise have been politically difficult to realize. Although not formally institutionalized, the informal talks and ad hoc meetings on the sidelines of formal meetings have emerged as an important ‘side product’ of the ARF. Both for North Korea and the regional powers, the ARF has provided an alternative space to discuss bilateral issues and questions of inter-state relations informally. These informal contacts have been actively encouraged by the ARF. For instance, the Chairman’s Statement from the 13th ARF, held in July 2006, shortly after North Korea’s missile test, explicitly “welcomed the informal discussion among some ARF participants on the situation in North-east Asia (...) and expressed their hope that this could contribute towards the early resumption of the Six-Party Talks.” Building on available data between 2000 and 2008, Table 2 illustrates how North Korea repeatedly used the ARF as a space for informal (bilateral) contacts with the U.S., South Korea, Japan, and China, as well as with others.

**Table 2: Informal Bilateral Meetings of the DPRK on the Sidelines of the ARF (2000-2008)**

<b>ARF Meeting</b>	<b>Informal consultations</b>	<b>Contents of interaction</b>
7th ARF 2000	NK-U.S.	First meeting on foreign minister level, normalization of bilateral relations
	NK-SK	Inter-Korean relations, summit agreements
	NK-China	TMD system
	NK-Japan	First-ever meeting on foreign minister level, normalization of bilateral relations
8th ARF 2001	NK-SK	Continuation of inter-Korean dialogue
	NK-EU	Establishment of diplomatic relations

9th ARF 2002	NK-Japan	Normalization of bilateral relations
	NK-U.S.	'Axis of evil,' bilateral relations
10th ARF 2003	NK-U.S.	NKs nuclear program
11th ARF 2004	NK-U.S.	Assessment of Six-Party process
13 <sup>th</sup> ARF 2006	NK-SK	Inter-Korean relations
14th ARF 2007	NK-Philippines	Bilateral relations, consultation agreement
	NK-SK	Denuclearization of the Korean peninsula
	NK-Japan	Bilateral relations
	NK-U.S.	Bilateral relations, Six-Party Talks
15th ARF 2008	NK-U.S.	Bilateral relations, denuclearization issue
	NK-SK- U.S.- J-PRC-R	Verification of NK's denuclearization

Source: Strothmann 2012: 115-116; expanded by the author

### The ARF as a Stage

While the conduct of both formal consultations and informal behind-the-scenes diplomacy have been crucial to the DPRK, there is another motive driving Pyongyang's participation with the ARF. That is, North Korea wants to use the institution as a stage on which North Korean representatives act in front of—and interact with—representatives from other member states. In fact, North Korea has repeatedly been described as a theater state (e.g. Kwon and Chung 2012), which means that it is a state directed towards the performance of drama, spectacle, and rituals, rather than more conventional ends, such as welfare.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the expression of the theatre state is the spectacle, which manifests itself in rituals, arguments and speeches, among many others (cf. Medlicott 2005). While the theater state argument has been primarily used to describe how the DPRK executes power on the domestic scene, it is argued elsewhere (Ballbach 2014; 2016) that this perspective is of equal relevance to help better understand North Korean foreign policy. In fact, the performative enactment or staging of foreign policy plays an essential role in the country's engagement with international and regional organizations and institutions. As Kihl (1998: 258-259) aptly puts it,

17. This term was coined by Clifford Geertz in 1980 in reference to a political practice in the nineteenth-century Balinese Negara, but its usage has since expanded.

international and regional organizations provide a stage where “Pyongyang’s role conceptions are articulated and dramatized.” It is there where North Korean representatives can promote the DPRK’s perspective on matters it deems important, where its national system and culture can be promoted to the international community, and its main patterns of identity can be articulated to representatives of other countries. For instance, following the breakdown of the 6PT, the DPRK repeatedly used the stage provided by the ARF in order to act upon its discursively constructed “nuclear state identity” (Ballbach 2016). As power in a theatre state is exercised through spectacle, these instances of staging foreign policy within international institutions do more than merely legitimate state power; they also signify the ceremonial constitution of state power in an open space—visible and acknowledged by all spectators.

#### **IV. Conclusions**

This paper has addressed North Korea’s interaction with the international community through East Asia’s sole institutionalized security institution on the Track-I level: the ARF. Building on a broader overview of North Korea’s interactions with the international community through regional and international organizations and institutions, the study, on the most basic level, reaffirms the important notion that North Korea, despite all (mis-)perceptions prevailing in the international discourse, is not the hermit kingdom as it is so commonly portrayed. Instead, it interacts with the international community in various ways, with international and regional organizations and institutions playing an increasingly important role in the country’s overall foreign policy conception. Hence, institutions matter to North Korea, although the motives and behaviors driving this engagement can vary as much as the organizations and institutions themselves. While North Korea’s interaction with international organizations and institutions has successively increased since the 1970s, the end of the Cold War led to a significant change in the DPRK’s foreign policy conception in this context, particularly with regards to North Korea’s increasing participation in security-related organizations

and institutions in the East Asian region as well as the increasing level of Track-II interactions. Supplement by such Track-II activities as the CSCAP, the ARF, as the only regional security institution on the Track-I level in East Asia, therefore represents a worthwhile example to find out more about the motives and patterns of interaction guiding the DPRK's participation with international institutions. Building on a brief discussion of the history of North Korea's participation in the ARF, it was shown North Korean officials in fact participated in a wide range of ARF-sponsored activities and meetings since its accession in 2000, both on the Track-I and Track-II level. While North Korea's participation with the ARF was particularly broad during 2002 and 2008, the patterns of North Korea's interaction with the ARF changed significantly thereafter, with the DPRK mainly focusing on meetings that are at a higher diplomatic level, such as the Foreign Ministers' Meeting and the ARF-SOM. In conclusion, three major lessons can be drawn from North Korea's engagement with the ARF—lessons that, if verified in further research, may bear significance well beyond the single case analyzed here: (1) To begin with, the organizational structure and the rules of decision-making are vastly important aspects regarding North Korea's decision to join—or not to join—an organization or institution. In this regard, the suitable institutional design of the ARF, combined with the proper international political context, was among the core preconditions for the DPRK to join the ARF. (2) The ARF has served as a bridge between North Korea and other states and representatives, time and again enabling direct consultations that would have been almost impossible on a direct bilateral footing. Particularly important in this regard is the fact that membership in the ARF has provided a bridge to those states with whom the DPRK does not have diplomatic relations, while at the same time serving as an additional (and cost-saving) channel to other states, such as China and Russia. (3) As foreign policy performances are vital to the constitution of the North Korean state (Ballbach 2016), the ARF has provided a stage for North Korean representatives to articulate, promote and dramatize Pyongyang's role conceptions. Such foreign policy performances, dramatized on the stage of international institutions, are as much about formal and informal consultations as they are about the cer-

emonial constitution of state power in an open space—visible and acknowledged by all spectators.

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