

Russia's Korea Policy in the 21st Century

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Abstract

This paper studies Russia's policy toward the two Koreas and its approach to the Korean WMD crisis, and on this basis makes a prognosis on Moscow's future approach to the peninsula. It begins with an analysis of the evolution of Moscow's relationships with Pyongyang and Seoul respectively, studies the approaches of various groups in Russia toward the prospect of Korea's reunification, describes the Russian approach to the Korean WMD crisis and Moscow's possible role in its resolution, and then makes some conclusions about the possible future trends in Moscow's Korea policy.

Key Words: Russia, South Korea, North Korea, WMD, Korea's unification

Korea has traditionally been an important field of Russia's international strategy. This was the case both before and during the Soviet period. A relative loss of interest in the Far East and Asia in general in the first half of the 1990s, due to the one-sided Western orientation of the Kremlin at the time, gradually gave way to a more balanced approach. This change naturally influenced Moscow's Korea policy. On May 15, 2000, speaking at a ceremony for the presentation of diplomatic credentials, President Vladimir Putin stated: "Historically and geopolitically the Korean peninsula has always been within the sphere of Russia's national interests."¹ As then-Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov wrote in his book: "Russian policy toward the Korean peninsula is based on the need to maintain good neighborly relations and partnerships with both Korean states."² These statements manifested the new policy aimed at promoting more active ties with both Seoul and Pyongyang and developing Russia's role in stimulating inter-Korean dialogue.

Russia officially and unofficially has two fundamental interests concerning the Korean peninsula, which have been stated repeatedly by Russian government representatives. First, Russia does not want weapons of mass destruction anywhere in the world, least of all near its border. Second, Russia does not want a war in Korea. There are several reasons for this. The first is the general Russian understanding of the current international situation, particularly Washington's disturbing desire to establish international rules while ignoring international law and inter-

¹-Vladimir Putin, "Speech at a Ceremony for Presenting Credentials," May 15, 2000, http://eng.kremlin.ru/speeches/2000/05/15/0000_type82914_126893.shtml.

²-Igor Ivanov, *Novaya rossiyskaya diplomatiya. Desyat' let vneshney politiki strany* [The New Russian Diplomacy: Ten Years of the Country's Foreign Policy] (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2001), p. 158.

national organizations – primarily the United Nations and its Security Council. The second reason is more practical: if there is a war near the Russian border it will be a terrible disaster, and nobody knows what might happen. Russians do not want a nuclear cloud or thousands of hungry refugees entering their territory, and neither do other neighboring countries. Third, both North Korea and South Korea are Russia's economic partners; Russia has economic projects in both countries. Generally, Russia wants a friendly and cooperative situation on its borders which would provide suitable conditions for the growth of Russia's own economy.

This paper studies Russia's policy toward the two Koreas and its approach to the Korean WMD crisis, and on this basis makes a prognosis on Moscow's future approach to the peninsula. It begins with an analysis of the evolution of Moscow's relationships with Pyongyang and Seoul respectively, studies the approaches of various groups in Russia toward the prospect of Korea's reunification, describes the Russian approach to the Korean WMD crisis and Moscow's possible role in its resolution, and then makes some conclusions about the possible future trends in Moscow's Korea policy.

Russia and the DPRK

Russia's neighbor, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), is not an ordinary country. Its peculiarity is not due to its hereditary dictatorship or the extreme poverty of its population neither is an exception in the contemporary world. What makes the North Korean regime unique, even in comparison to the most exotic countries, is that it

combines all the repressive features of Soviet-style communism with a harsh form of Oriental despotism.

The current situation in North Korea can be characterized in the following way. Under current conditions, there are no signs that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has a chance to pull itself out of its deep economic crisis, which is acquiring an increasingly systemic character. The ruling regime is not capable of moving toward reforming the country's economy. It fears losing control of the situation, and with it, losing power. Attempts to carry out so-called government measures confirm these fears. The North Korean authorities are attempting to strengthen the administrative-command system of managing the economy, keeping the same "proven" methods of management. The DPRK political elite have so far conserved a single solidifying element, which is the clan of Kim Jong-il. The absolute poverty of the population, their lack of rights, their strong ideological indoctrination, and the repressiveness of the leaders create an atmosphere of hopelessness - and disbelief in the possibility of change for the better - that so far has permitted the regime to maintain political stability by controlling the political mood in society. However, the situation in the country continues to worsen and one cannot rule out its possible destabilization. The army and security agencies have significantly expanded their ability to influence North Korean society. The process of militarization has engulfed almost all spheres of peoples' lives. Leaders make maximum use of increasing international pressure on North Korea in connection with its nuclear missile activity to strengthen the standing of the army, which remains the guarantor of the continued life of the present political regime. The role and significance of the party in the DPRK has changed noticeably. The

Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) has in effect turned into a propagandist element of the military leadership. The task of the party today is to carry out intensive expository educational work in society and to propagandize the "Songun" policy (a priority of the army) as the only true political course capable of putting the country on the road to "prosperity and happiness."

The political elite of the DPRK are concerned today about the problem of regime succession, and of ensuring stability and predictability in this process. With this goal in mind, several career appointments have recently been made to the government Defense Committee. At the same time, despite the deepening North Korean crisis, the spontaneous, ungovernable collapse of the regime in the near future is unlikely. This is due to many factors, but the most important is the Chinese. China, which is strongly involved in and concerned about North Korean issues, currently does, and will continue to do, all that it can so that processes in North Korea are under control and Chinese interests in the DPRK and in the entire Korean peninsula are met. It is clear that the sudden collapse of the DPRK and unification into a single Korea - for which the United States has exerted strong pressure - is not in line with the interests of China.³

Some Russians may doubt whether Russia - a country that is trying to join the contemporary developed world - should do business with this historic anachronism at all. Under former President Boris Yeltsin, especially at the beginning of his term, the Moscow leadership answered "no" to this question. There were both ideological and economic reasons

³-Here the author bases his statements on work by the leading Russian expert in Korean Studies, Valery Denisov.

for this answer. When Andrey Kozyrev was appointed foreign minister in the early 1990s, he tried to make the new Russian foreign policy the opposite of that of the Communist Soviet Union. As he announced in August 1991, democratic Russia, the U.S. and other Western democracies were natural friends and allies in the same way as they had been natural enemies of the totalitarian Soviet Union.⁴ Naturally, following this course, the Soviet Union's former friend, Pyongyang, and its former foe, Seoul, would also exchange places. Besides, Russia was experiencing serious economic difficulties. As a result, Moscow suspended economic aid to Pyongyang. This contributed to a severe economic crisis in North Korea that led to mass hunger and the deaths of tens or possibly hundreds of thousands of people. At that time, Moscow expected that the North Korean regime, like the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, would soon fall, and concentrated all its efforts on developing relations with Seoul, which it viewed as a much more valuable economic partner.

However, after Vladimir Putin came to power, the new Russian leadership concluded that it was necessary to normalize relations with Pyongyang. The shift took place in 2000. On February 9, Moscow and Pyongyang signed a full-scale Treaty on Friendship, Good-Neighborly Relations and Cooperation that, according to Igor Ivanov, "underlined the decade of cool relations between the two countries."⁵ In July of the same year, during one of his first trips abroad as Russian President, Putin paid a state visit to Pyongyang. This was the first visit of a top Moscow leader to the capital of the DPRK in the entire history of that country. A joint

⁴-Andrey Kozyrev, *Preobrazhenie* [The Transformation] (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1995), p. 211.

⁵-Ivanov, *Novaya rossiyskaya diplomatiya*, p. 158.

declaration consolidating the new level of that relationship was signed. In August 2001, North Korean leader Kim Jong-il paid a bizarre, almost one-month-long visit by train to Russia.

Improving relations with Pyongyang became a manifestation of the general evolution of Moscow's foreign policy to a less one-sided and more pragmatic and realistic course. As a result, as noted in the 2007 Russian Foreign Ministry review, "the potential to retain good neighborly relations with the DPRK was retained overall, although Russia's consistent position against missile and nuclear tests and support of United Nations Security Council resolutions 1695 and 1718 caused a pained reaction in Pyongyang."⁶ Indeed, Russia and the DPRK have built up strong potential for the expansion of bilateral relations. This potential has been present throughout the history of Soviet-Korean relations, as when both countries were allies developing multilateral cooperation (Of course, there were problems in both the political and economic spheres). This led to the current state of bilateral relations. Moscow and Pyongyang significantly updated the legal framework of their interstate relations. The Treaty of 2000 replaced the 1961 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance. It marked the beginning of a new stage in relations between Russia and the DPRK, based on the principles of international law, and lacking its former ideological base.

Over the past 10 years, more than 40 intergovernmental and inter-departmental agreements have been signed between the two parties. The

⁶- "Vneshnepoliticheskaya i diplomaticheskaya deyatel'nost' Rossiyskoy Federatsii v 2007 godu. Obzor MID Rossii" [Foreign Policy and Diplomatic Activity of the Russian Federation in 2007: A Survey by the Russian Foreign Ministry] (Moscow: Russian Foreign Ministry, March 2008), http://www.un.int/russia/new/MainRootrus/docs/off_news/180308/newru2.htm.

signing of the Pyongyang and Moscow Declarations at the summit meetings of 2000-2002 was important for the future development of Russian-North Korean relations. The new agreement, set forth in the policy declaration agreements, states that there is a solid legal basis for deepening Russian-North Korean cooperation. Russia has consistently adhered to the mutual agreements and provisions recorded in these documents, and has built its relations with North Korea based upon them.

Moscow has purposefully and actively worked, and continues to operate, within the framework of a political settlement of the nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula. Russia condemned North Korea's nuclear ambitions, and it has taken a principled position at the UN on issues such as the missile launches carried out in North Korea in July 2006 and the test of a nuclear device in October of that same year. Russia played the leading role in the development of two UN Security Council resolutions, 1695 and 1718 (missile and nuclear), which reflected not only the serious concern of the world community regarding the actions of Pyongyang but also appealed to North Korea to halt the implementation of its nuclear missile program. These resolutions also contained concrete steps to curb the military capabilities of North Korea, showing a path toward a political solution to the complex problems of the Korean peninsula.

An unresolved problem in bilateral relations remains North Korea's debt to Russia of \$9 billion. Pyongyang insists on a full debt cancellation under the pretext that this debt was formed as a result of North Korea fulfilling the task of "defending the Far Eastern outpost of world socialism." It is understood that in the midst of the current financial and economic crisis, Russia is not prepared to demand the money from Pyongyang. But

further development of economic trade or investment cooperation with the DPRK is not possible without the signing of an appropriate agreement on the restructuring of the North Korean debt.

For many years, the volume of bilateral trade has not grown. Trade turnover between Russia and the DPRK in recent years has been in the range of \$100-150 million. As a result of a permanent economic crisis and numerous natural disasters, North Korea is not able to supply the needed quantities of such traditional products such as magnesite clinker bricks, ferrous and nonferrous metals, cement, etc. In turn, the country cannot import the oil and petroleum products, manganese and chrome ore, and other inputs needed for its economy. Factors that hamper trade turnover capacity also include failure to meet the requirements of North Korea's trading partners - the chronic shortage of goods, delays in payments for goods received, or complete lack of payment.

Some opportunities for economic cooperation with North Korea do exist. Pyongyang has expressed its wish to revive production at the thirty-eight industrial facilities which had been built with Soviet assistance. To do this, it will need Russian specialists and equipment. North Korean leaders have expressed interest in a project to rebuild the Trans-Korean Railway and connect it with the Trans-Siberian line (the original line was largely disassembled during the severe crisis in North Korea). Finally, the Pyongyang regime needs spare parts for the Russian-produced weapons with which its army is equipped, and it would also like to acquire new Russian weapons. All these projects are interesting, but they should be approached with caution and realism. First, it is important for Russia that North Korea is able to pay in cash and not simply apply for another loan on which it can easily default later. Second, it is hardly reasonable

to fuel tensions on the peninsula and to heighten the perception of threat against South Korea. In principle, Russian business is ready to work in the North Korean market, but only after the settlement of the DPRK's debt and on the condition that North Korean business structures comply with civilized forms and methods of cooperation.

Russia provides humanitarian aid to the North Korean population, which experiences constant food shortages. Most of this assistance is delivered through the UN World Food Program (WFP). This assistance is provided every year. What's more, in 2008, Russia decided to provide emergency food aid to the North Korean population, giving the DPRK population approximately three thousand tons of wheat flour. In 2008, through the UN World Food Program, Russia also contributed \$5 million for the purchase of food and supplies for North Koreans.

The Russian Federation is interested in having a good, reliable and predictable neighbor in the DPRK, and in developing multifaceted relations built on the principles of modern international law, non-interference in internal affairs, mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit. However, these relations should not be characterized by attempts to beat or to deceive the partner, or to achieve goals that are inconsistent with universally recognized international norms, as is often characteristic of Pyongyang's policies.

Russia and South Korea

Political relations between Moscow and Seoul have been developing steadily since the late 1980s, when Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev first made decisive steps toward normalization. Over the subsequent

decades of Russian-South Korean relations, a system of government-level consultations has been established and nine summits have been held. Speaking to the MBC and KBS TV channels on February 26, 2001, President Putin commented: "I believe we do not have any disputed issues between our two countries. The level of political relations is very high. In the international arena we often hold practically the same positions."⁷

The visit by South Korean President Kim Dae-jung to Russia in May 1999 played a significant role in strengthening ties between the two countries. It resulted in several important documents. During an official visit by President Putin to South Korea in February 2001, a joint Russian-Korean statement was issued and intergovernmental agreements on the protection of classified military information and on tourism were signed.

After President Roh Moo-hyun came to power, Russian-Korean contacts intensified. In October 2003, President Putin and his Korean counterpart met during the APEC summit in Bangkok. During the same year, Federation Council Chairman Sergei Mironov and Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov visited South Korea and the fifth meeting of the Russia-Korea Joint Committee of Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation was held. For the first time in its many years of cooperation, South Korea received Russian military equipment and weapons, a significant portion of which went toward the payment of the debt the Russian Federation owed to the Republic of Korea, totaling \$600 million. The economic,

⁷-Interv'yū prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii V.V.Putina yuzhnkoreyskim telekanalam "Em-Bi-Si" i "Key-Bi-Es" [Interview with President of the Russian Federation Vladimir V. Putin by the South Korean TV Channels of MBC and KBS], February 26, 2001, http://www.mid.ru/dip_vest.nsf/99b2ddc4f717c733c32567370042ee43/cc617ec37ecb5ed2c3256a3a003f5735?OpenDocument.

trade, and investment cooperation between Russia and the Korean Republic has grown markedly in recent years. Trade turnover has grown from \$2.7 billion in 2000 to \$15 billion in 2007. In 2008 mutual trade reached \$20 billion. However, Russia's exports to the Republic of Korea are dominated by raw materials, whereas its imports are dominated by finished products. Changes to the structure of Russian supplies to South Korea occur very slowly, and this causes dissatisfaction on the Russian side.

Investment cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Korea has been gaining momentum in recent years. South Korean investments total approximately \$3 billion dollars (growing by more than \$700 million in 2008). Although Russian investment in the Republic of Korea's economy is relatively small (approximately \$30 million dollars), after the construction of the Hyundai car factory in South Korea with the participation of Russian capital, that investment will grow to almost \$700 million dollars. The momentum to expand trade and economic cooperation between our two countries has provided a solution to the problem of Russia's debt to the Republic of Korea. As a result of negotiations, an agreement was signed in 2003 on the restructuring of Russia's debt and its payment by 2023.

In 2008 a South Korean astronaut performed a successful flight into space as part of a Russian crew. Deliveries of liquefied natural gas from Russia to the Republic of Korea have begun (1.5 million tons annually). Gazprom and the Korean National Gas Corporation (KOGAS) are discussing the construction of a liquid gas plant, as well as a gas-chemical complex. The parties reached agreements in principle to construct a pipeline from Siberia to the countries of Northeast Asia. The Korean state-owned gas

corporation has taken upon itself the preparation of a technical-economic study of this project. Rosneft and the Korean National Oil Corporation signed a memorandum which provides for joint participation in the Sakhalin-3 project, the development of the West Kamchatka shelf of the Okhotsk Sea. Work to find oil in this region has already begun. The drilling of the first wells showed that this is a very promising project. Oil reserves are estimated at 3.7 billion barrels.

Cooperation in the area of auto manufacturing is intensively developing. According to South Korean experts, Russia is one of the most promising international markets for automobiles. South Korean automobile concerns annually supply more than 200,000 automobiles to the Russian Federation (including those built on Russian territory). Near St. Petersburg, construction has begun on an automobile plant worth \$400 million. By 2010, the plant will produce 100,000 cars annually.⁸

It is highly unlikely that any future problems will develop in the political relations between Moscow and Seoul. There are no issues of dispute between them and both are interested in seeing cooperation in the region and the international arena as a whole. Economic cooperation between the two countries has also grown significantly, and has good prospects for the future. South Korea has the potential to become the largest investor in Russia among the countries of the region. Russian civilian industry does not lag as far behind Korean industry as it does behind that of Japan, a country with which Moscow also has a territorial dispute. At the same time, the large Korean corporations which constitute

⁸-Valeriy Denisov, "Rossiya na Koreyskom poluostrove: Problem i perspektivy" [Russia on the Korean Peninsula: Problems and Prospects], Institute of International Studies, MGIMO, Analytical Papers No. 545, June 2009, pp. 9-10.

the basis of Korean industry are likely to have more courage to invest in Russia than smaller ones from China or Taiwan. There exists a real opportunity for a meeting of Korean investment capital with advanced Russian science and technology in various areas of production.

The Russian View of Korea's Unification

Moscow's Korea policy is influenced by the Russian political elite's varying points of view on the two Korean states. Various political forces in Russia view Seoul and Pyongyang differently. The more pro-Western politicians and specialists, who are called rightists in Russia, usually maintain that relations with South Korea - with its market economy and successful democratization - are much more important than relations with the totalitarian communist North. They support tougher sanctions against the North and more support for the U.S. and Japanese positions within the six-party talks. They argue that Russia should stimulate the collapse of the "communist dictatorship," or at least should not prevent it from happening, because creating a united Korea with a market economy would be in Russia's interests - both economically and geopolitically. A united Korea would be instrumental in developing the Russian Far East and would provide a solid counterweight to communist China. Supporters of a more traditional Soviet-style policy sympathize with Pyongyang because they consider the DPRK as an ally in the ongoing struggle against U.S. world domination. Supporters of both points of view can be found both within and outside the government (although those in the government do not openly express the most radical opinions).

However, the above groups currently do not exert decisive influence

on practical foreign policy. At present, Moscow's foreign policy is formulated and implemented by the group close to President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. They promote the pragmatic approach toward the two Koreas described above which treads a middle path between the two more radical views.

It is quite clear that the North Korean regime is historically doomed, and there might be only a few in the Kremlin who doubt it. It might take five, ten or fifteen years, but it will eventually disappear from the world political map and a new, united Korea will emerge as Russia's neighbor. It will be a major country, comparable to Britain or France by its population and economic strength. South Korea, a country much more populous and developed than the DPRK, will surely be its core. Therefore, it would not be reasonable for Russia to pursue a strategy of long-term relations with Pyongyang.

However, the timing and method by which reunification occurs is important both for Koreans and their neighbors. No one wants the North Korean regime - with its large stockpile of advanced weapons - to collapse abruptly, prompting its hungry population to seek refuge in neighboring countries. This scenario is the greatest nightmare of leaders in Seoul who know very well that even the much more developed Germany is experiencing serious difficulties incorporating its Eastern half (which was much more developed and prosperous than North Korea is now). Seoul would much prefer to see a reformist leadership come to power in the North and prepare its population to accept more modern ways of living by pursuing gradual economic and political reforms. And in this field Seoul's interests coincide with those of Moscow and Beijing, which are also interested in North Korea, not as a source of chaos and

various threats, but as an effective economic partner.

From this point of view, Moscow's traditional ties with Pyongyang are an important asset: the latter has top-level contacts with a very limited number of countries. It is in Russia's interest to demonstrate, in cooperation with China and South Korea, to the North Korean regime the advantages of the market economy, and to encourage reformist tendencies within it, hinting that by introducing market reforms the Korean Communists would be able to last longer, or perhaps even become an integral part of the new political system as a leftist or regional party - as was done by former Communists in Albania, Germany and some other East European countries. In the initial stage, the examples of China and Vietnam - where the ruling Communists managed to stay in power and improve the living standards of the population by introducing economic reforms - will be even more persuasive.

The history of communist states shows that changes should evolve naturally from within the system. Such changes are usually the result of the growing influence exerted by forces and individuals possessing a strong knowledge of the outside world, a clear understanding of their own society's shortcomings, and the ability to view that society within a historical perspective. Such forces are stimulated by international cooperation which brings in foreign investment, international companies with modern management practices, access to world news and information, the need to learn foreign languages, foreign travel, etc. Russia is interested in such cooperation with North Korea for both economic and political reasons, as it needs to use every opportunity to promote trade, stability and cooperation in the Far East in order to create more opportunities for the development of its own

troubled Far Eastern regions.

The Russian Approach to the Korean WMD Crisis

Russian (Soviet) policy regarding nuclear non-proliferation on the Korean peninsula has always been clear, consistent and principled. Russia has advocated, and continues to advocate, a non-nuclear Korean peninsula and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery in the region. Russian cooperation with the DPRK in the nuclear energy field during the first nuclear crisis of 1993-1994 was based solely on the international legal standards enshrined in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The experimental nuclear reactor, built in the DPRK with Soviet scientific and technical assistance in the early 1960s, was under IAEA supervision. The Joint Institute for Nuclear Research in Dubna trained North Korean experts exclusively in the peaceful use of nuclear power. In providing technical assistance for the construction of a nuclear plant on the territory of the DPRK, the obligatory condition set by the Soviet Union was that Pyongyang must sign the NPT. Only after Pyongyang became a signatory to the NPT did the Soviet Union sign the agreement on the construction of North Korean nuclear power plants. The Soviet side responded positively and supported the North Korean proposition for the formation of a nuclear-free zone on the Korean peninsula, as expressed in official statements by the government and the DPRK Foreign Ministry in June 1986, June 1987 and November 1989. Moscow reacted positively to the Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, signed by the heads of the DPRK and the Republic of Korea in December 1991.

At the time of the first nuclear crisis in 1993-1994, when the DPRK announced its withdrawal from the NPT, Russia ceased providing assistance to North Korea for construction of its nuclear power plant, provoking an angry reaction from Pyongyang. As a depositary of the NPT, Russia took part in all international actions aimed at persuading North Korea to return to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and to continue cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Moscow welcomed the DPRK-U.S. agreement in Geneva in October 1994. Although this was a bilateral agreement, the important ideas contained in the Geneva Framework Agreement were put forth in Russia's initiative on March 24, 1994, which called for the convening of a multilateral forum for the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, to guarantee the security of both Koreas.⁹

Pyongyang's announcement of its wish to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty came as a surprise for Moscow. The official statement of the Russian Foreign Ministry issued on January 10, 2003 expressed deep concern. It maintained: "It is undoubted that such a move can only exacerbate the already tense situation around the Korean peninsula and inflict substantial harm upon the universal international legal instruments of ensuring global and regional security." Moscow expressed hope that Pyongyang "will listen to the unanimous opinion of the world community and of its neighbors and partners and make a choice in favor of the observance of the international obligations assumed in the area of non-proliferation and of an equal and mutually beneficial dialogue with all the concerned parties on the pressing issues of national

⁹-Denisov, "Rossiya na Koreyskom poluostrove" [Russia on the Korean Peninsula], pp. 12-13.

security.”¹⁰

The Russian approach to the crisis over North Korean weapons of mass destruction should be viewed against the general backdrop of Moscow's understanding of the situation on the Korean peninsula and of the non-proliferation issue in general. The proliferation of nuclear weapons is extremely dangerous for the world at large. Even so, it conflicts with Russia's national interests more so than the interests of other major powers. Russia is the only country in the world with the capacity to make a retaliatory nuclear strike against the United States. In this respect, Russia is one of the two most powerful countries in the world. The proliferation of nuclear weapons devalues Russia's military strength and, consequently, Russia's overall influence in the world. For Washington, however, the spread of nuclear weapons is not so critical because this is only one of several areas where the U.S. is first in the world. For Russia, this is the only factor that puts it on a par with the U.S. and higher than other countries. Nuclear proliferation, especially near Russia's borders, is not only dangerous for Russia, but it also undermines Russia's influence in the world.

The North Korean announcement of its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, its refusal to cooperate with the IAEA, the restarting of its nuclear program and its admission that it possesses nuclear weapons all caused serious concerns and led to condemnation from Moscow. Russia is very serious in cooperating with other countries on the non-proliferation program. Moscow has repeatedly stated that

¹⁰ - Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation regarding the DPRK's intention to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, <http://www.ln.mid.ru/Bl.nsf/arh/02B24D38CA8450B843256CAA004745EC?OpenDocument>.

North Korea should renounce all programs for both nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction. However, Russia also believes that Washington should take its share of responsibility for the failure of the 1994 deal with Pyongyang and reach a compromise with North Korea in order to avoid hostilities. Moscow shares these principles with Beijing. A joint Russian-Chinese declaration signed during a visit by Chinese leader Hu Jintao to Moscow in late May 2003 reiterates: "The parties state that preservation of peace and stability on the Korean peninsula meets the security interests of the two countries and also the common aspirations of the international community. The scenarios of power pressure or the use of force to resolve the problems existing there are unacceptable. The parties advocate the creation of a nuclear-free status for the Korean peninsula and observance there of the regime of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Simultaneously, the security of the DPRK must be guaranteed and favorable conditions must be established for its socio-economic development."¹¹

Russia has a strong interest in determining specifically how to proceed with settling the problem of weapons of mass destruction in Korea and resolving the situation there in general. It would be a positive step if the United States and North Korea were to come to some type of bilateral settlement. If three-party talks are needed, such as those that were held in Beijing in April 2003, that would be acceptable. If Russia were to be included, that would also be acceptable. It is the result that is most important.

¹¹- "Joint Declaration of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China," the Kremlin, Moscow, May 27, 2003, <http://www.in.mid.ru/Bl.nsf/arh/6A3C0C886E26414043256D34002FCEBF?OpenDocument>.

Russia plays an important role in the six-party talks (consisting of Russia, the United States, China, Japan, the DPRK, and the Republic of Korea), which began in connection with the 2003 nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula, due to its constructive efforts to find a political means to solve the problem. In fact, Russia's initiatives, which provided a "packaged solution" to the crisis, formed the basis of agreements that were reached at the six-party talks. This, together with the joint statement of "the six" on September 19, 2005 and the initial Action Plan of February 13, 2007 to implement the joint statement, led to an agreement within the six-party talks on October 3, 2007. The difficult path toward implementing all of these documents began in mid-2008 with the question of Pyongyang giving information to the participating countries of the Beijing talks about its nuclear designs and facilities. The United States began the process of taking North Korea off the list of state sponsors of terrorism and removing restrictions on trade with the DPRK under the law on trade with enemy states. Moscow's constructive service contributed to the ability of "the six" to reach a compromise when Russia's direct participation succeeded in overcoming another deadlock in the negotiations. This concerned the release of North Korean accounts in Banco Delta Asia (Macau) and the transfer of \$25 million via Russian banks to the DPRK. This allowed the six-party talks to resume, which ultimately led to progress in resolving the Korean nuclear crisis.

In accordance with the Beijing agreements, Russia was to deliver 100,000 tons of fuel oil to North Korea by the end of 2008 (the first batch of 100,000 tons has been delivered). Russia supplied a total of 200,000 tons of energy to North Korea in 2008 with a value of \$200 million. These deliveries were carried out as compensation for the disabling of North

Korea's nuclear facilities. As stressed by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, Russia has fully fulfilled its obligations in this matter. In the words of the Russian President, North Korea needs a system of "positive incentives."¹²

Of course, there are different ways to solve these or other crisis situations. Preference is given, of course, to diplomatic and political means and negotiations. The appearance at the Russian borders of another nuclear state, albeit with a small nuclear capability, is totally unacceptable for Moscow. Therefore, Russia was alarmed that the development and implementation of the DPRK's nuclear weapons program took not one or two years, but a significant period of time, during which the Soviet Union and the DPRK were still military and political allies, and Russia provided North Korea with assistance in implementing a peaceful nuclear program and participated in the construction of a nuclear power plant on DPRK territory. North Korea assured Moscow that its nuclear intentions were entirely peaceful. It was only after the Soviet Union declared that it was going to normalize relations with South Korea that Pyongyang suggested that, in such a case, it would need to create a "powerful weapon" in order to protect its statehood.¹³ At that time, Moscow either did not take this threat seriously or considered it to be another North Korean bluff. In any event, on October 9, 2006, North Korea conducted a nuclear weapon test. Even earlier, in February 2005, it declared itself a nuclear state.

¹²-Dmitry Medvedev, "Interv'yu predstavityam sredstv massovoy informatsii stran 'Gruppy vos'mi'" [Interview with the Representatives of the Media of the G8 Countries], July 3, 2008.

¹³-As quoted in Denisov, "Rossiya na Koreyskom poluostrove," p. 14.

It should be kept in mind that in both the six-party talks as well as in signed agreements, the North Korean side actually has not fully rejected its positions of principle. According to the former Russian Deputy Foreign Minister A.P. Losyukov, “The North Koreans are not planning to reject anything 100 percent. It is not possible to get them to reveal all of their programs or to receive a report on every gram of plutonium made.”¹⁴ That assessment is unquestionably accurate. The main goal of the DPRK nuclear program is to develop its scientific and technical potential. Losyukov is also correct in stating that “the mystery shrouding the North Korean nuclear program is itself a weapon of sorts for Pyongyang that it skillfully uses during the Beijing talks.”¹⁵ According to some specialists, the decision by North Korea to destroy its nuclear facilities in Yongbyon was connected with the production of resources for those plants and the need to liquidate them. Pyongyang considers it entirely logical to have others foot the bill to accomplish that task. In fact, it has managed to do just that, both in the past and in the present. As an example, the United States paid \$2.5 million for the destruction of the cooling tower at the nuclear plant in Yongbyon.

In the second half of 2008, Pyongyang achieved its desired result when it once again halted the process of bringing its nuclear facilities offline and threatened to restart the Yongbyon plant if the United States did not remove the DPRK from its list of states that sponsor terrorism. The U.S. State Department officially announced that henceforth North

¹⁴ - “Koreytsy umelo i mudro shantazhiruyut svoikh partnerov” [Koreans Skillfully and Wisely Blackmail Their Partners], *Vremya novostey*, May 14, 2008, <http://www.vremya.ru/2008/82/5/203804.html>.

¹⁵ - *Ibid.*

Korea is not a state sponsor of terrorism. However, the U.S. did not rule out the possibility of “returning North Korea to the terrorist list” if Pyongyang did not fulfill its obligation to permit verification of its nuclear programs.

In renewing good neighborly relations at the end of the 20th century and signing a number of political and legal documents, the Russian Federation and North Korea expressed the firm intention “to make positive efforts for disarmament and global stability and security against all the policies of aggression and war. The DPRK and Russia express the willingness to get in touch with each other without delay if the danger of aggression to the DPRK or to Russia is created or when there is the need to have consultations and cooperate with each other under the circumstances where peace and security are threatened.”¹⁶ That is one of the key provisions of the Pyongyang declaration that North Korea effectively ignored when it embarked on the course of escalating the nuclear missile crisis - a move that led to the United Nations Security Council passing two severely anti-North Korean resolutions (1695 and 1718). Despite the fact that everyone was able to reach a new compromise agreement within the framework of the six-party talks and start liquidating the DPRK’s functioning plutonium facilities a short time later, questions remain regarding North Korea’s willingness to fulfill the obligations it has assumed in mutually approved documents. First of all, it is necessary to solve the problem of verification of North Korean nuclear facilities. That requires first renewing official relations between the DPRK and the International

¹⁶ - Joint Russian-Korean Declaration, July 20, 2000, http://www.fortunecity.com/meltingpot/champion/65/joint_decl.htm.

Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and carrying out inspections of nuclear facilities based on existing rules and guidelines.¹⁷

The nuclear problem on the Korean peninsula is not isolated to the DPRK. South Korea has also made attempts to acquire a nuclear potential of its own. In the 1970s, the government of President Park Chung-hee was on the verge of creating a nuclear bomb, and only a sharp reaction from the United States was able to temper Seoul's ambitions. All the same, it is disquieting that South Korea did not abandon its efforts to develop a "non-peaceful use" of nuclear power. It is known that South Korea ran a secret uranium enrichment program in 1982 and again in 2000, and Seoul was compelled to "admit" as much and inform the IAEA. Although this fact did not prompt an anti-South Korean demarche by the international community, it did serve as a sign that the IAEA would have to pay close attention to Seoul's activities in the nuclear field.

As an interested party and as a depositary to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Russia is likely to continue actively working for an overall diplomatic solution to the Korean nuclear crisis, and will work to transform the Korean peninsula into a zone free from weapons of mass destruction.

¹⁷-Denisov, "Rossiya na Koreyskom poluostrove," pp. 14-15.

Conclusion: The Outlook for Russian Policy toward the Korean Peninsula

Achieving an economic revival will remain the primary goal for Russia for many years into the future. It was largely this goal that prompted the shift toward close cooperation with the West, since the current Russian leadership considers the support of the leading industrial powers to be instrumental to Russia's economic development. However, the same goal also motivates the ongoing diplomatic task of maintaining stability on the borders and developing mutually beneficial cooperation with Russia's neighbors. For the current leadership in Moscow, it is clear that the DPRK will remain one of Russia's neighbors for the foreseeable future, and this reality should be used as much as possible to Russia's benefit - that is, for economic cooperation and for increasing Russia's role in both the region and the international community as a whole. To achieve this goal, the Kremlin continues to revive its traditional ties with Pyongyang, and uses them to increase security and stability on the peninsula and to stimulate the inter-Korean dialogue. This course is supported by the bulk of Russia's centrist political elite, and it will continue to be pursued for the foreseeable future.

The new Russian activism on the Korean peninsula manifested itself in Moscow's approach to the inter-Korean dialogue. Its position has come a long way since the time of traditional Soviet-era communism, when it unconditionally supported Pyongyang's military adventures. The new Moscow-Pyongyang treaty signed in 2000 (unlike the 1961 version) does not contain any military or security obligations. President Putin stressed on several occasions that Russia "has assisted the peaceful settlement of

the Korea problem and will do so in the future”¹⁸ and that his country “is ready to use the potential of its relations with both South and North Korea” to assist in such a settlement.¹⁹ At the same time, speaking at the Republic of Korea National Assembly on February 28, 2001, the Russian leader articulated five principles of Russia’s approach: 1) the peace process and cooperation between the North and the South should be based on principles agreed upon by the Korean people themselves, with no external interference; 2) all problems should be resolved exclusively through peaceful, diplomatic means in the spirit of the South-North Korea Declaration of June 15, 2000; 3) Russia would welcome the process of creating a peaceful, united Korean state that would be friendly toward Russia and other countries; 4) Russia will support the non-nuclear status of the Korean peninsula; and 5) Russia will cooperate with countries that are interested in implementing projects aimed at economic development of the region and creating a solid basis for stability in the Far East, in which the countries of Northeast Asia would participate.²⁰

This position is understandable. Russia can only be optimistic about the tendencies toward normalization on the Korean peninsula and the prospect of the country’s reunification. The result of normalization will be the stabilization of the military and political situation on the

¹⁸ - Press-konferentsiya po itogam rossiysko-koreyskikh peregovorov [Press Conference Summing Up Russian-Korean Negotiations], February 27, 2001, http://www.mid.ru/dip_vest.nsf/99b2ddc4f717c733c32567370042ee43/2633f6d888988866c3256a3a003f5738?OpenDocument.

¹⁹ - Vladimir Putin, “Vystuplenie v Natsional’ nom sobranii Respubliki Koreya” [Speech at the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea], February 28, 2001, <http://www.mid.ru/Ns-dvbr.nsf/58954e9b2d194fed432569ea00360f06/432569d80022638743256a060045e60e?OpenDocument>.

²⁰ - *Ibid.*

peninsula, and this is in line with Russia's interests. There is still another reason why the emergence of a united Korean state would be beneficial for Russia. Politically and economically, that state would certainly more closely resemble the current South Korean model than the system in the DPRK. This means that Russia will have a larger and more active economic partner and investor. Russia, especially its neighboring Far Eastern regions, would definitely benefit from such a partner.

The emergence of a stronger, united Korea would also meet Russia's geopolitical interests. The further development of Russia's relations with Japan is limited by an ongoing territorial dispute. Many in Russia are concerned with the potential security threat that a rapidly developing China might represent. With Korea, Russia does not have any of these problems. Moreover, in Russia's view, Korea can provide a useful counterbalance to the Japanese and Chinese influences in the region. Russia would likely play a similar geopolitical role for Korea, especially in view of the complicated history of both Korean-Japanese and Korean-Chinese relations. Further, a larger, united Korea, freed of a permanent military threat, would logically pursue a more self-confident foreign policy, reducing the role of the U.S. on the peninsula. At the same time, due to the leading role the United States occupies in the modern world and the fact that Korea's neighbors are much stronger and more populous than even the two Korean states combined, Korea will be motivated to develop cooperation with Washington.

Considering the above-mentioned points, future Russian policy will continue striving to develop equal relations with both Korean states based on the principles of international law, without allowing a tilt in favor of either side. Without artificially dampening or accelerating relations

with either of the two Koreas, Russia will proceed strictly on a mutually advantageous basis. In reality, however, because of the economic situation in the North and the unpredictability of the North Korean regime, that will mean accelerating cooperation with Seoul. Moscow will take a constructive approach to settling the nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula with the prospect of creating a zone in the region that is free of weapons of mass destruction and the means for their delivery. Moreover, after completing delivery of 200 tons of fuel oil, Russia is unlikely to continue participating in compensating North Korea's further steps toward the denuclearization of the peninsula, and in subsequent negotiations will emphasize the need for Pyongyang to fulfill its obligations from pertinent international and legal documents such as the United Nations Charter, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, UN Security Council Resolutions 1695 and 1718, and others. It will promote efforts toward a military détente on the Korean peninsula, the moving of military forces of both sides away from the line of contact in the demilitarized zone, and the subsequent reduction of those forces under strict international control. At the same time, Russia will develop mutually profitable trade and economic ties with North Korea and take steps to restructure that country's debt. However, Russia will not write off that debt because it might at some point be possible for Pyongyang to repay it in some form – for example, within the context of a joint economic project involving Russia, South Korea and North Korea. Also, Russia will endeavor to improve the mechanism for the inflow of South Korean investment into the Russian economy, take steps to introduce Russian businesses into the high-technology sector of the South Korean economy, and step up work on three-party (North Korea, South Korea and Russia) cooperation on

railway transportation, connecting the Trans-Korean and Trans-Siberian Railways, among other things.

The new atmosphere of cooperation that emerged in Russian-U.S. relations following U.S. President Barack Obama's visit to Moscow in September 2009 and Washington's decision to cancel plans to deploy elements of its missile defense system in Eastern Europe will clearly contribute to developing a stricter position by participants in the six-party negotiations regarding North Korea's nuclear ambitions. That type of approach has already taken shape with regard to the nuclear problem in Iran, and has already produced certain fruits in the form of the greater flexibility shown by Iran. Beijing apparently understands that, as seen by the increasing pressure it has placed on Pyongyang, first sending special representative and member of the State Council of China Dai Bingguo to North Korea in autumn 2009, followed by a visit from Prime Minister Wen Jiabao. During Wen Jiabao's visit, North Korean leader Kim Jong-il agreed to return to discussions of the nuclear problem in a multilateral format on the condition that his country may enter into bilateral talks with the United States.

Those announcements were met with mixed reactions in Moscow. On one hand, Moscow favors a renewal of the six-party talks. On the other hand, Moscow is clearly dissatisfied with North Korea's understanding of a "multilateral format" in which Pyongyang reaches an agreement with Washington, while all the other participants pay for it to reject nuclear weapons, without presenting terms or demands of their own. That dissatisfaction was clearly expressed by the official representative of Russia's Foreign Ministry, Andrey Nesterenko, in a briefing on October 8, 2009. Nesterenko said that Russia looks positively at discussing the

nuclear subject in any format “given the understanding that such talks are not a substitute for six-party negotiations, but to the contrary are conducive to creating the conditions for their renewal.”²¹

As the country with the greatest influence over Pyongyang, the approach taken by China differs from that of Moscow. If only a minority of the Russian elite sympathize with the Pyongyang leadership and consider it necessary to keep it in power, the Chinese experience far more complex feelings on the matter. On one hand, Beijing is extremely unhappy about Pyongyang's efforts to build nuclear weapons and considers it unacceptable both from the standpoint of proliferation and because those weapons have fallen into the hands of such an unpredictable regime. Neither do the Chinese entertain any illusions about the character of the Pyongyang regime. At international conferences, Chinese specialists with close ties to governmental authorities openly refer to the Pyongyang regime as being “feudal,” “dictatorial,” “medieval” and so on.

On the other hand, wide swaths of Chinese society, governmental circles and especially the army have strong historical feelings regarding their North Korean “communist brothers.” People who participated in the war against South Korea are still alive, as is their influence, and monuments to the heroes of that war have been erected all across northern China. For the Beijing leadership now to pursue a course of fully isolating North Korea would mean admitting the complete failure and senselessness of all of its policies regarding the Korean peninsula from the very formation of the People's Republic of China, and would mean that the

²¹ - Briefing by official Russian Foreign Ministry Representative A. Nesterenko on October 8, 2009, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/1D8245069B6FD34EC32576490059CA89.

thousands of Chinese heroes of the Korean War had died in vain. To take such a step would be extremely difficult, both psychologically and politically.

Thus, the future of Russian policy regarding the North Korean nuclear problem will largely depend on the general atmosphere of international relations and the condition of its relations with the United States in particular. If the new climate of cooperation with Washington continues and develops, Moscow can take a more active position - for example, by encouraging China to exert greater pressure on North Korea. If U.S.-Russian relations worsen, Russia will follow its previous tack of easing sanctions and employing only verbal admonitions against the North Korean regime.

It is another question as to what Russia's actions might be should the situation in North Korea suddenly become unstable as a result of the leader's death and a subsequent power struggle. In that case, Moscow's actions will probably be focused on eliminating the danger of any possible military conflict or nuclear accident, and on preventing an uncontrolled flow of North Korean migrants into Russian territory. In that event, Russia will be ready to cooperate with North Korea's other neighbors - primarily China and South Korea - in the search for ways to bring the situation under control.

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