

Moscow Ponders Korea Unification

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Abstract

Throughout the past decade, under both presidents Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev, the Russia's government policy toward the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK) has remained remarkably consistent. Russia has adhered to several integrated key goals, strategies, and tactics in both the security and economic realms. Russian policy makers are eager to normalize the security situation on the Korean Peninsula. They do not want yet another nuclear-armed state bordering Russia, especially one armed with inaccurate missiles and an erratic dynastic dictatorship. In addition, they fear that the DPRK's possession of nuclear-armed ballistic missiles could encourage still further nuclear proliferation in East Asia and beyond as well as the spread of missile defenses in response. Yet, Russia's fundamental goals regarding the Koreans do not include reunification or a new form of government in North Korea. Russian officials seek to change Pyongyang's behavior, not its regime. Korean unification could result in humanitarian emergencies, economic reconstruction burdens, arms races, loose nukes, and military clashes. Russians favor a "soft landing" for the North Korean regime—a gradual mellowing of its domestic and especially foreign policies, including the renunciation of nuclear weapons.

Key Words: Russia, Moscow, Putin, Medvedev, nuclear

In an April 7, 2011 interview with Chinese Central Television before the BRIC summit in China, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev expressed both alarm and frustration with the explosive situation in the neighboring Korean Peninsula, stating that: “We are also part of the region.” As in the past, Medvedev urged all parties to pursue moderate policies that reduced the danger of conflict. “The Korean Peninsula has seen enough of war. I believe that both Koreas can reach an agreement. Whipping up passions, rattling arms, maneuvering – they are just aggravating the situation.”¹

Throughout the past decade, under current President Medvedev and Vladimir Putin, president from 1999-2007 and now Russia’s prime minister, Russian government policy toward the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK) has remained remarkably consistent. This policy has adhered to several integrated key goals, strategies, and tactics across the security and economic realms. Russian policy makers are eager to normalize the security situation on the Korean Peninsula, though not necessarily through unification, both for its own sake and to realize their economic ambitions there.

In the security realm, Russia’s objectives include averting another major war on the Korean Peninsula, preventing the DPRK’s proliferation of nuclear technology or ballistic missiles, maintaining Moscow as a major security actor in the region, and the eventual peaceful elimination of Pyongyang’s nuclear program. Russian officials stress their opposition to the DPRK’s continued possession of nuclear weapons. They do not want another nuclear-armed state bordering Russia, especially one with inaccurate missiles flying close to Russian territory, and with an unpredictable dynastic dictatorship. In addition, they fear that the

¹- “Interview by Dmitry Medvedev to China Central Television (CCTV),” April 12, 2011, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/2059>.

DPRK's possession of nuclear-armed ballistic missiles could encourage further nuclear weapons proliferation in East Asia and beyond, while simultaneously leading to the spread of ballistic missile defense systems that could degrade Russia's nuclear deterrent.

Yet, Russia's fundamental goals regarding the Koreas do not include reunification or a new form of government in North Korea. Russian officials seek to change Pyongyang's behavior, not its regime. Korean unification could result in the deployment of U.S. military forces into the northern half of the newly unified Korean state. Many Koreans would want American soldiers, warplanes, and naval forces to remain in their country to balance their militarily more powerful neighbors—China, Japan, and Russia. U.S. policy makers might accept such an invitation if the alternative looked to be a Korean decision to retain the North's stockpile of nuclear weapons. Russian policy makers would seek to avoid this scenario as well as the other possible calamities of precipitous regime change—humanitarian emergencies, economic reconstruction, arms races, loose nukes, and military clashes. Like many South Koreans and most Chinese, Russians favor a “soft landing” for the North Korean regime—a gradual mellowing of its domestic and especially foreign policies, including the renunciation of nuclear weapons. This perspective places Russia at odds with most policy makers in Washington and Tokyo, who would welcome Pyongyang's political transformation regardless of the likely economic and security problems that could arise in a transition.

Strategies and Tactics

Common Russian strategies and tactics to achieve these security goals include inducing North Korea to end nuclear weapons testing, halt its provocative actions, and dismantle its nuclear weapons and ballistic

missile programs voluntarily. Moscow tries to accomplish these goals by providing economic assistance and security assurances, promoting dialogue among the parties, minimizing the use of coercive sanctions, encouraging all parties to fulfill their previous commitments, maintaining a prominent role for Russian diplomacy, and promoting the six-party talks and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) – two bodies in which Russia is a privileged member – as the main institutions for Korean diplomacy.

One reason Russian policy makers have been eager to reduce tensions on the Korean Peninsula (short of regime change) is to achieve their economic objectives in East Asia. Russian officials want to expand their economic relations with both Koreas while integrating Russia more deeply into the prosperous East Asian region. Russians hope that the closer ties would encourage Asian investment and technology transfers that would help modernize the Russian economy. In addition, the increased trade ties would benefit Russian consumers and Russian exporters. A major Russian goal is to promote the economic recovery of the Russian Far East, which lags behind western Russia economically and is becoming a security liability due to the demographic collapse of the ethnic Russian population along the Russia-China border regions. Furthermore, developing economic ties with South Korea is important to prevent Russia from becoming overly dependent on the People's Republic of China (PRC) for its energy exports and other commercial deals. Moscow's leverage with Beijing and other third parties is enhanced insofar as Chinese negotiators worry that, if they bargain too hard, then Russia can reach better deals with South Korea.

In terms of concrete projects, Russians place much hope on proposals to link the Russian railroad system with that of the two Koreas, creating a 10,000-kilometer-long Euro-Asian land transportation corridor that could move goods between Europe and the Pacific faster than

maritime shipping. Another major project involves collaborating with ROK companies to build energy pipelines to transport Russian oil and natural gas to South Korea and other East Asian markets, perhaps by transiting North Korea's territory. More generally, Russian policy makers want Russian businesses to sell additional goods and services to South Korea in return for high-tech trade and investment from the ROK.

These proposals' implementation awaits normalization of the security situation on the Korean Peninsula. Until then, Moscow's economic ties and influence in Pyongyang will lag far behind that of South Korea and particularly China, which provides North Korea with foreign assistance in the form of energy, food, and other key commodities. The DPRK can survive even in the absence of economic ties with Russia. Moscow's influence in the Koreas is also diminished by its generally low diplomatic and economic weight in East Asia, which Russia's newly energetic regional diplomacy has yet to correct.

Tools

Still, Russia disposes of several instruments of influence in East Asia. First, it is a veto-wielding member of the UN Security Council, which can apply sanctions and other enforcement members to uphold UN goals. Second, eastern Russia hosts some large military units, representing all branches of the Russian armed forces. For example, the headquarters of the Russian Navy's Pacific Fleet is located at Vladivostok. Third, Russia exports large volumes of oil, natural gas, and other raw materials that are coveted by many East Asian countries. Russian energy companies are eager to diversify their exports beyond their traditional European markets. Since most existing oil and gas pipelines flow westward, however, Russian energy exports have been hobbled by limited

transportation networks, though these infrastructure bottlenecks will soon be overcome. Russian companies are also constructing a more advanced energy processing infrastructure in the Russian Far East (RFE), to include oil refineries, liquefied natural gas (LNG) plants, and facilities at sea ports optimized to export energy.

Russia has been a participant, along with North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, and the United States, in the six-party talks that, since 2003, have been seeking to secure an end to the DPRK's nuclear weapons program in return for various economic, diplomatic, and other incentives. The four interconnected objectives of the Talks are eliminating nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula, normalizing relations between the DPRK and all the other parties, securing the economic development and regional integration of North Korea, and achieving an enduring peace on the Korean Peninsula and the broader East Asian region.²

Unfortunately for Moscow and other participants, the Talks have been characterized by the old Leninist slogan, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back," except it seems that nine steps back occur for every ten steps forward, with the walker frequently appearing ready to drop dead en route. The parties were able to secure a denuclearization agreement at the end of the fifth round of the Talks, which ended on February 13, 2007.³ Under its terms, North Korea pledged to shut down and eventually dismantle its Yongbyon nuclear complex in return for food, economic aid, and the prospect of normalizing relations with the five other countries.

²- Scott Snyder, "North Korea's Nuclear and Missile Tests and Six-Party Talks: Where Do We Go From Here?" June 17, 2009, Testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade, p. 3, http://www.cfr.org/publication/19647/prepared_testimony_by_scott_a_snyder.html.

³- Edward Cody, "Tentative Nuclear Deal Struck with North Korea," *The Washington Post*, February 13, 2007, <http://times.hankooki.com/lpage/nation/200702/kt2007021320383011990.htm>.

Despite some further progress in 2007 and early 2008, North Korea soon began to move in a retrograde direction, with DPRK provocations including resuming ballistic missile launches and a nuclear weapons detonation. The reasons for these reversals, though still unclear, appear related to the contested political succession process in Pyongyang, where North Korean leader Kim Jong-il appears determined to have his third and youngest known son, 26-year-old Kim Jong-un, as his heir.

Goals

Russian officials do not want North Korea to possess nuclear weapons. They were clearly angered by Kim Jong-il's defiance of their warnings against testing a nuclear weapon in October 2006. On February 5, 2007, the Russian Ambassador to South Korea, Gleb Ivashentsov, complained that, "The site of the nuclear test by the DPRK on October 9th, 2006 is situated at the distance of just 177 Kms to our border. We do not like that. We do not need in the proximity of our borders neither nuclear and missile tests nor saber-rattling by anyone."⁴ The Russian delegation to the six-party talks subsequently demanded that the DPRK dismantle its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon rather than simply suspend operations in order to promote North Korea's complete nuclear disarmament.⁵ In late May 2007, Putin signed a decree banning Russian government and private institutions from transferring equipment, materials, or knowledge that the DPRK could use to develop weapons. It also forbade Russian citizens or institutions from engaging in financial operations with people

⁴- Scarlett Lim, "Russian Amb. Ivashentsov Stresses Russia Will Assist Inter-Korean Business Ties," *Seoul Times*, February 5, 2007, http://theseoultimes.com/ST?url=/ST/community/foreign_missions/foreign_missions.html.

⁵- "Six Nations to Wrap Up N. Korea Nuclear Talks," *RIA Novosti*, February 13, 2007, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20070213/60629950.html>.

or entities designated by the UN as supporting the DPRK's nuclear weapons program.⁶ In an interview published in South Korea's *JoongAng Ilbo* newspaper on the eve of his visit to Seoul in November 2010, Medvedev restated Russian worries about North Korean nuclear activities near Russia's borders. He described DPRK's nuclear program as "present[ing] a systemic challenge to the international nuclear non-proliferation regime."⁷ Russian specialists joined with those of other leading nuclear powers in writing a UN report that asserts that the DPRK annually exports approximately \$100 million worth of missiles and other weapons in violation of international sanctions.⁸ Yet, Russian strategists consider a nuclear-armed DPRK as posing only an indirect or inadvertent threat since they do not expect that the DPRK would have reason to attack Russia.⁹

Russian leaders have also sought to constrain North Korea's testing of long-range missiles. The DPRK's ballistic missile program, originally based on Soviet-era weapons technology, has presented a major security problem for Russia and other countries. North Korea's improving ballistic missile capabilities, as well as its seeming willingness to sell missiles and missile-related technologies to any foreign buyer, have alarmed much of the international community, particularly its neighbors. The ballistic missile issue assumed renewed importance in both 2006 and 2009, when

6- "Путин подписал указ о санкциях против КНДР" ["Putin podpisal ukaz o sanktsiyax protiv KNDR"], *Gazeta.ru*, May 30, 2007, http://www.gazeta.ru/news/business/2007/05/30/n_1075339.shtml; "Russia Makes U-turn, Joins UN Sanctions against N. Korea - 1," *RIA Novosti*, May 30, 2007, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20070530/66347459.html>.

7- "Medvedev Alarmed at North Korean Nuclear Activity," *Reuters*, November 9, 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6A84BW20101109>.

8- "North Korea Yearly Selling \$100M in Illicit Arms, Report Says," *Global Security Newswire*, November 11, 2010, http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20101111_1352.php.

9- Andrei Lankov, "Changing North Korea: An Information Campaign Can Beat the Regime," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 6 (November/December 2009), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/65619>.

Pyongyang's decision to resume testing its long-range ballistic missiles led the UNSC to impose sanctions on North Korea. In turn, the DPRK responded on each occasion with aggressive rhetoric and the testing of a nuclear weapon.

Many Russians consider the DPRK missiles as posing a possible inadvertent threat to Russian territory due to their proximity and inaccuracy. In July 2006, North Korea launched seven missiles that landed in the Sea of Japan within Russia's 200-nautical miles (370 km) exclusive economic zone.¹⁰ One missile apparently veered off course and fell close to the Russian port of Nakhoda.¹¹ Russia's most important Pacific coast city and the main port of the Russia's Pacific Fleet, Vladivostok, is located only 140 kilometers from North Korean territory. In October 2006, the Russian delegation voted in favor of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1718, which mandated a moratorium on the DPRK's testing of ballistic missiles. When the North made evident its preparation to resume missile testing in early 2009, the Russian military announced that it had deployed advanced missile defenses nearby to counter any DPRK missiles heading toward Russian territory. General Nikolai Makarov, chief of staff of the Russian armed forces, even claimed to have deployed a division of Russia's most advanced air defense system, the S-400, to the Russian Far East.¹² President Medvedev has cited North Korea's missile launches as well as its nuclear weapons tests as a "concern for us" given

¹⁰ - Vladimir Yevseev, "Реальна ли северокорейская ракетная угроза?" ["Real'na li severokoreyskaya raketnaya ugroza?"], *RIA Novosti*, April 28, 2009, <http://www.rian.ru/analytics/20090428/169433736.html>.

¹¹ - Marie Jégo, "Kim Jong-il, son aura, son goût du kaki" ["Kim Jong-il, his aura, his preference for khaki"], *Le Monde*, June 5, 2009, http://www.lemonde.fr/cgi-bin/ACHATS/acheter.cgi?offre=ARCHIVES&type_item=ART_ARCH_30J&objet_id=1085399.

¹² - "Russia Deploys Air Defence on N. Korea Missile Tests," *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 26, 2009, <http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-world/russia-deploys-air-defence-on-nkorea-missile-tests-20090826-ezmi.html>.

that, "We are located in close proximity to this country."¹³

The most recent missile crisis arose on April 5, 2009, when North Korea launched a rocket that closely resembled its Taepodong-2 missile, justifying its testing as a satellite launch. The United States and its allies argued that the launch would violate a UNSC ban on DPRK missile-related activities and threatened to impose new sanctions should the launch occur. Seeking to avoid another round of sanctions, Russian and PRC officials urged North Korean restraint. The DPRK ignored these and other international entreaties and warnings. Despite the relatively mild UN action that followed, which consisted in a denunciatory statement read by the rotating UNSC President, the DPRK responded to the presidential statement by announcing it would permanently withdraw from the six-party talks. It subsequently detonated another nuclear device.

A major Russian goal in East Asia is to prevent DPRK actions from encouraging other countries, either through emulation or for defensive reasons, to pursue their own offensive and defensive strategic weapons. As a matter of principle, Russian government representatives stress their support for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which legitimizes Russia's status of one of the few nuclear weapons states. More pragmatically, Russian policy makers have opposed North Korea's acquisition of nuclear weapons for fear it might induce South Korea, Japan, and even Taiwan to pursue their own nuclear forces, which under some contingencies might be used against Russia.

Russian leaders also fear that the DPRK's ostentatious displays of its improving missile and nuclear capacities will encourage the United States and other states to develop and proliferate ballistic missile defenses (BMD)

¹³ - Dmitry Medvedev, "Interview to RAI and Corriere della Sera," Russian President's website, July 5, 2009, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2009/07/05/1000_type82914type82916_219023.shtml.

that could be used to negate the effectiveness of Russia's own missiles. Concerns about U.S. and other Western BMD systems have been especially evident in Russian statements and policies regarding the European theater, but are not absent from Russian thinking regarding the Asia-Pacific region as well. Foreign Minister Lavrov made evident Russian unease about further strategic weapons proliferation when he visited Seoul in April 2009. Lavrov told the press that, "I hope that no one would ... use the situation around North Korea to set up alliances, build missile defense networks or announce an intention to possess nuclear weapons." Alluding to Japan, he added that, "Unfortunately, we hear these announcements from a neighboring country. We think that it is unacceptable."¹⁴ When traveling to Japan a few weeks later, Prime Minister Putin likewise warned that, "I think it would be completely wrong if we heightened the emotional intensity of our response to the present events and used it to upset the situation in the region or to start an arms race. I think that would be the greatest possible mistake, which would lead us to a dead end."¹⁵

Mediator

To avert regional proliferation, war on the Korean Peninsula, and other calamities, Russian policy makers have sought to mediate Korean security disputes. Russian diplomatic initiatives in Korea also aim to highlight Moscow's status as an important player in East Asia by em-

¹⁴ - "N. Korea Does Not Plan Yet to Return to Nuclear Talks - Russian FM," *RIA Novosti*, April 24, 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20090424/121300603.html>.

¹⁵ - "Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's Interview to Japan's Kyodo Tsushin News Agency," The NHK Japan Broadcasting Corporation, and the Nihon Keizai Shimbun Newspaper (The Nikkei), May 7, 2009, Interview published on May 10, 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20090510/121553018.html>.

phasizing Russia's ability to communicate with all parties. Russian diplomacy has pursued a similar strategy in the Middle East, where Russian officials justify their ties with Iran, Hamas, the Libyan government and its NATO-backed opposition, and other controversial actors by citing Moscow's value for preserving lines of communication and opportunities for mediation among the parties in conflict.

In some respects, Moscow is well-situated to serve as a key mediator in international efforts to resolve the disputes between North Korea and South Korea, Japan, and the United States. Most obviously, Russia borders the Korean Peninsula, sharing a 17-km-long common frontier along the Tumen-river with the DPRK. The proximity guarantees substantial Russian official interest in developments in the Koreas as well as a dual desire to have influence in any international negotiations regarding the Peninsula as well as ensure that Russian representatives participate, even indirectly, in any multilateral official dialogue. The geographic proximity has also contributed to the development of substantial historical and ethnic ties between Russians and Koreans. Yet, Russians have outgrown some obsolete historical proclivities, such as viewing North Korea as a fellow communist ally. Today, the Russian government is perhaps one of the most disinterested potential mediators in the Koreas, hoping to benefit from almost any development that relaxed regional tensions. Russian economic and security interests would be strongly served by an enduring period of peace and prosperity in the Koreas providing it was not accompanied by reunification or abrupt regime change or reunification, scenarios that could divert investment capital from Russia to North Korea, disrupt other regional economic flows, and present unwelcome security challenges to the RFE.

Unfortunately, Russia has not enjoyed sufficient influence in the Korean region to broker a settlement. After a decade of neglect during the 1990s under Yeltsin, Putin took it upon himself to significantly improve

relations with North Korea, making a personal visit to Pyongyang in July 2000. But Putin suffered an embarrassment a few days later when he announced at the G-8 summit that Kim Jong-il had told him that North Korea would abandon its ballistic missile programs in return for international assistance in creating a civilian space program. The DPRK government quickly disavowed Putin's statement, terming it a joke.¹⁶

Nonetheless, Russian officials have continued to seek a mediator role in Korea, emphasizing their stance of benign neutrality regarding the conflict. On April 23, 2009, Lavrov became the first foreign minister from one of the six parties to visit Pyongyang since the DPRK had resumed testing ballistic missiles and withdrawn from the six-party talks. In an effort to restart the Talks, he delivered a private letter from Putin to North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, who declined to meet with Lavrov.¹⁷ The Russian Foreign Minister then went to South Korea, where he told the press that Russia was prepared to launch DPRK satellites on Russian rockets, a service Russia was already providing for ROK satellites.¹⁸ Russian diplomats subsequently stressed that they were in contact with all the other parties in their effort to resume the Talks. Telling the Russian media that "communication channels have not been cut off and it would be strange if this happened," Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexei Borodavkin said that Russian diplomats were holding consultations both through the DPRK embassy in Moscow and the Russian embassy in Pyongyang. Remarking that he had also talked with senior ROK, U.S., and Japanese officials, Borodavkin added that, "We are thinking of how to find

¹⁶- Sergei Blagov, "Russia's Lost Korean Opportunity," *Asia Times Online*, January 26, 2003, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/EF26Ag01.html.

¹⁷- "Russia to Appeal to North Korea," *BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8013836.stm>.

¹⁸- "Russia Offers to Launch North Korea Satellites," *Daily Times*, April 25, 2009, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2009%5C04%5C25%5Cstory_25-4-2009_pg4_1.

the way out of this deadlock situation and hold consultations with partners and want to discover opportunities to resume the Talks.”¹⁹

Yet, Russia’s relative low status in the DPRK’s ruling circles was evidenced in the reception given to Lavrov and his colleagues in Pyongyang in 2009. That year, both Russia and China sent senior officials to the North Korean capital. DPRK leader Kim Jong-il chose to meet with both Premier Wen Jiabao in October and Chinese Defense Minister Liang Guanglie in November, but he did not bother to even greet Lavrov in April, or the Chairman of the Upper Chamber of the Russian Parliament, Sergei Mironov, in December. Moscow’s problem is that its diplomatic and economic weight in East Asia is too limited. Russia’s relations with Japan are strained over the South Kuriles, while the PRC has much greater economic clout in both Koreas and Chinese immigration and investment is transforming the RFE into a natural resource appendage of the PRC’s economy. Although U.S. diplomats seek to engage their Russian counterparts regarding Korean issues, their main interlocutors are in Tokyo, Seoul, and Beijing. To enhance their influence in the region, Moscow diplomacy needs to become more generous toward Japan, and less focused on China, whose representatives generally ignore Russians’ opinion on Korea.

Alarm and Activism

Russian diplomacy became especially active in late 2010, following North Korea’s November 23 artillery attack on Yeonpyeong Island, a South Korean possession in the disputed West Sea border region, which killed two ROK soldiers and two South Korean civilians. Unlike Russia’s

¹⁹- “Russia Continues Efforts to Bring N. Korea to Six-Party Talks,” *RIA Novosti*, July 2, 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090702/155417602.html>.

refusal to concur with most international experts that North Korea had in March torpedoed the Cheonan, a South Korean warship, on this occasion Russian diplomats explicitly condemned the DPRK for its artillery barrage. After he castigated North Korea in a press conference, Lavrov later explained that why he had rejected the DPRK claim that the South Koreans and Americans provoked their attack by conducting military maneuvers in the disputed border region. He stated that “firing drill is one thing and shelling a residential area is quite another ... people died and that is most important.”²⁰ Moscow’s position thus diverged from Beijing, which had refused to blame North Korea for either incident, and moved Russia closer to the views of South Korea and its allies, which wanted Pyongyang to accept responsibility for these aggressive acts and improve its behavior.²¹

Despite diverging from Beijing in publicly casting blame on Pyongyang for the artillery barrage, the Russian government’s initial response to the DPRK attack was to support the PRC’s November 28 proposal call to hold emergency six-party talks on the crisis.²² Lavrov said his government considered it “indispensable to relaunch the process of six-party talks on the North Korea issue.”²³ But Japan, South Korea, and the United States objected to a move that they feared could reward the DPRK for its misbehavior as well as divert attention from North Korea’s need to fulfill its commitment to dismantle its nuclear weapons infrastructure.

²⁰-“Russia Slams N. Korea Over Island Attack,” *Chosun Ilbo*, December 15, 2010, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2010/12/15/2010121500790.html.

²¹- Shin Hae-in, “Russia ‘Coming Together’ with Partners on N.K.,” *Korea Herald*, December 16, 2010, <http://www.koreaherald.com/national/Detail.jsp?newsMLId=20101216000969>.

²²- Bill Varner, “Russia Backs China’s Call for Six-Party Talks on North Korea,” *Bloomberg*, November 30, 2010, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-11-30/russia-backs-china-s-call-for-six-party-talks-on-north-korea.html>.

²³-“Russia Worried about North Korea’s Nuclear Activities,” *AFP*, December 13, 2010, http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_asiapacific/view/1099004/1/html.

Moscow's next move was to engage in some high-profile shuttle diplomacy, inviting DPRK Foreign Minister Pak Ui Chun and Wi Sung-lac, the lead ROK nuclear envoy, to Moscow for separate meetings in mid-December. Russian diplomats also held emergency consultations with Japanese and American diplomats on the crisis. Still, Lavrov suggested that the U.S.-South Korean military exercise that occurred before the shelling had also increased regional tensions.

This last theme became more prominent after Seoul and Washington announced their intention to hold another joint exercise, again with live artillery firing, from December 18-21 in the West Sea near Yeonpyeong Island, with North Korea threatening to retaliate vigorously. The Russian foreign ministry summoned the South Korean and U.S. ambassadors to express "extreme concern" over a planned live-firing drill near a disputed maritime border with North Korea.²⁴ Deputy Foreign Minister Alexei Borodavkin met with the envoys and, according to a ministry statement, "insistently urged the Republic of Korea and the United States to refrain from conducting the planned firing." The statement noted that a similar exercise had precipitated the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island the previous month.²⁵ The Russian military raised the alert status of its units near the Koreas. When its strongly worded messages failed to avert the ROK-U.S. exercise, Russian diplomats called an emergency session of the UN Security Council, which met on December 19, to avert a possible military exchange and reenergize the diplomatic track. Russia's draft resolution wanted UN Secretary General Ban Ki moon to send a special envoy to Seoul and Pyongyang to "consult on urgent measures to settle peacefully

²⁴- Steve Gutterman, "Russia Warns South Korea and U.S. over Live-Firing Drill," *Reuters*, December 17, 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6BG2MR20101217>.

²⁵- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Statement of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs," December 17, 2010, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b4325699005bcb3/ea9bc14169cf375cc32577fc005c87ab?OpenDocument.

the current crisis situation in the Korean Peninsula.”²⁶ Until now, the Council had been reluctant to involve Ban directly in the crisis due to his previous position as ROK foreign minister. Explaining Moscow’s unusually high-profile actions, Russia’s ambassador to the United Nations, Vitaly I. Churkin, said that situation “directly affects the national security interests of the Russian Federation.”²⁷

Russia’s limited influence proved insufficient to secure support for its diplomatic initiative. Fortunately, the DPRK government decided not to respond with force to the drills, and even offered to allow IAEA inspectors to reenter their country, while the UNSC members could not agree on the wording of statement. The United States wanted language that explicitly blamed North Korea for provoking the recent crisis, while China objected to singling out Pyongyang for condemnation.²⁸ The crisis died down after the North Koreans decided to ignore the ROK-U.S. exercise and then began to cite the dangers of escalation as a reason why it was important to resume inter-Korean defense talks.

Carrots and Minimal Sticks

Russian diplomats generally oppose using economic and other sanctions to punish countries whose governments misbehave. In the case of the DPRK, as with Iran, Russian policy makers argue that a non-coercive, incentive-based strategy offers the best means for persuading the DPRK

²⁶-Colum Lynch, “Russia Presses for UN role in Mediating Crisis in the Korea,” ForeignPolicy.com, December 18, 2010, http://turtlebay.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/12/18/russia_pushes_deeper_un_role_in_mediating_crisis_in_the_korea.

²⁷-“Russia’s Draft UN Statement Proposes Sending Envoy to Korea,” *RIA Novosti*, November 19, 2010, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20101219/161845167.html>.

²⁸-“Russia: Security Council Inclined to Send Envoy to Korea,” *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, December 20, 2010, <http://www.earthtimes.org/articles/news/358920inclined-send-envoy-korea.html>.

to moderate its behavior and fulfill its international obligations. In the case of North Korea, Russian officials worry that using sanctions risks antagonizing Pyongyang that the DPRK will lash back, unpredictably and destructively, in anger, and that Russian interests, and possible Russian territory, could be adversely affected in the process.

After the October 2006 DPRK nuclear test, Putin declared it was important not to back North Korea into a corner and leave it with no option but to lash back aggressively – the same argument he regularly makes regarding Iran.²⁹ Russian policy makers also strived to break the escalating tensions in early 2009 when the DPRK government was preparing to launch a rocket and threatened retaliation if the UN sanctioned it in response.³⁰ While seeking to dissuade the DPRK launch, they also argued against sanctioning Pyongyang further on the grounds that it would drive its government into deeper and aggressive alienation, scuttling hopes for early implementation of its denuclearization commitments. After the DPRK went ahead with the launches, Medvedev argued that, while Russia has supported international sanctions against Pyongyang for its nuclear tests and missile launches, “that does not mean that we must continually inflame passions. On the contrary, we must seek ways and approaches to convince our North Korean colleagues to talk to us, because I don’t want to be forced to imagine any other course of events,” adding that – in an allusion to the DPRK’s nuclear capabilities – “if something does happen, it will be the worst scenario, the most appalling one we can imagine.” For this reason, he concluded, “there is no alternative to a dialogue with North Korea. We need to use every possible means.”³¹

²⁹– “Putin Optimistic on North Korea,” *St. Petersburg Times*, October 27, 2006, http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action_id=2&story_id=19283.

³⁰– “Russia Opposes Sanctions against N. Korea over Rocket Launch,” *RIA Novosti*, April 8, 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20090408/120980228.html>.

³¹– “Interview to RAI and Corriere della Sera.”

When North Korea detonated another nuclear weapon on May 25, 2009, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a sharp note of condemnation. The statement called the test a “violation” of previous UNSC resolutions and a “serious blow” to the nuclear nonproliferation regime. It also complained that, “The latest DPRK moves are provoking an escalation of tension in Northeast Asia.”³² Foreign Minister Lavrov advocated the adoption of a strongly condemnatory UNSC resolution, but he opposed adopting further sanctions or other coercive measures, instead endorsing a resumption of the six-party talks. “We should not look to punish for the sake of punishment only... The problem can only be settled through talks.”³³ After the November 23 DPRK artillery attack on Yeonpyeong Island and confirmation that North Korea had developed a uranium enrichment facility, Prime Minister Putin called on North Korea to “unconditionally abide by” its denuclearization commitments.³⁴ He stressed, however, the importance of resuming talks among the parties. During an interview with U.S. talk show host Larry King, he explained that, “It is impossible to come to an agreement without dialogue.”³⁵

When pressure for sanctions by other parties becomes overwhelming, Russian officials generally endorse applying limited sanctions against the DPRK as a “lesser evil” between doing nothing and imposing more severe sanctions or using force. They have sought to keep them moderate to meet the demands from the other players to pressure North Korea while not

³²- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Information and Press Department, “Statement of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” May 25, 2009, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/2663b05ad45f1561c32575c1005dcf07?OpenDocument.

³³- “UN Needs ‘Tough’ N. Korea Resolution: Russia,” *AFP*, May 27, 2009, <http://www.spacewar.com/2006/090527095511.ye29xj6w.html>.

³⁴- Shin Hae-in, “Russia ‘Coming Together’ with Partners on N.K.,” *Korea Herald*, December 16, 2010, <http://www.koreaherald.com/national/Detail.jsp?newsMLid=20101216000969>.

³⁵- “Situation on Korean Peninsula Very Acute and Disturbing - Putin,” *RIA Novosti*, December 20, 2010, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20101202/161585282.html>.

driving Pyongyang into belligerence. As one of the five permanent UNSC members, Russia can veto its decisions, thereby controlling the severity of international sanctions and other UN-approved coercive measures. Moscow has blocked proposed resolutions imposing severe sanctions on the North or authorizing the use of force to enforce Pyongyang's compliance with UNSC resolutions. But Russian policy makers have supported some penalties in order to keep the UN, and Russia, a central player in the international response to the Korean issue. Russian diplomats fear a repeat of the Kosovo (1998) and Iraq (2003) examples when Western governments decided to bypass the UN and employ force on their own initiative through coalitions of the willing after they could not work through the UNSC due to Moscow's veto. Russian diplomats must balance blocking harsh UN sanctions while sustaining Western interests and aspirations that working through the UN remains a useful tactic.

For instance, Russia joined with the other permanent UNSC members in enacting Resolution 1718 (2006) on October 14, after the DPRK tested its first nuclear explosive device on October 9, 2006. The text condemned North Korea's nuclear test and banned the transfer of items related to the DPRK's nuclear, ballistic missile and other unconventional weapons programs. UNSCR 1718 also freezes the foreign assets and prohibits international travel of those individuals involved in the DPRK's nuclear, ballistic missile, and other weapons of mass destruction programs, along with their family members. Additional provisions prohibit the transfer of major conventional weapons systems — such as attack helicopters, combat aircraft, tanks, and warships — as well as luxury goods to North Korea. UNSCR 1718 gave countries the right to inspect cargo moving to and from North Korea in order to enforce its provisions.

Despite the efforts of the United States and Japan to enact a more strongly worded resolution, opposition from Moscow and Beijing

excluded language that might authorize UN members to enforce its provisions with military action.³⁶ The Russian and PRC delegations successfully insisted that the resolution should aim less to punish North Korea retroactively than to modify its future policies. Russia also joined with China to moderate the sanctions imposed after the DPRK's April 2009 long-range ballistic missile test. After what the DPRK termed its "space rocket" apparently fell harmlessly into the sea, the Russian delegation to the UNSC engaged in tough negotiations with the other permanent UNSC members over how to respond. Eventually, they decided that the rotating president of the UNSC for that month, Mexican Ambassador Claude Heller, could issue a statement that termed the launch a "contravention" of Resolution 1718, which forbids the DPRK from engaging in missile-related activities.³⁷ The United States and Japan had initially sought another formal UNSC resolution that imposed immediate penalties on the DPRK, but Moscow opposed such a move. The Russian delegation also tried to delay measures to tighten existing sanctions in order to relax tensions and coax Pyongyang back to the negotiating table.³⁸

While criticizing the DPRK for testing nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles, Russian government representatives have also faulted Western countries for failing to meet their previous commitments to the DPRK, implying that this failure might have precipitated the subsequent North Korean behavior. In September 2008, Lavrov chastised Japan's government for failing to render its share of economic assistance

³⁶- Warren Hoge, "China and Russia Stall Sanctions on North Korea," *The New York Times*, October 13, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/13/world/asia/13nations.html?pagewanted=print>.

³⁷- "TEXT-UN Security Council statement on N. Korea," *Reuters*, April 13, 2009, <http://in.reuters.com/article/oilRpt/idINN1333144920090413>.

³⁸- "UN Progresses toward Additional North Korea Sanctions," *Global Security Newswire*, April 22, 2009, http://gsn.nti.org/gsn/nw_20090422_9233.php.

to the DPRK due to its bilateral dispute regarding the Japanese citizens abducted by North Korean intelligence agents between 1977 and 1983.³⁹ Russian officials have also criticized Washington when Moscow considered American negotiating tactics excessively inflexible.⁴⁰ Russian officials seemed to agree with DPRK complaints in 2008 that they were not receiving the pledged amounts of heavy-fuel oil or equivalents in return for closing their Reprocessing Plant and the Fuel Fabrication Facility at Yongbong. They also sympathized with DPRK's irritation at not being removed from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terror and the demanding standards of verification insisted on by Washington. When in Pyongyang in April 2009, Lavrov called on all parties to fulfill the existing agreements, arguing that, "If everybody takes such a stand, we will be able to get through the crisis."⁴¹ George Toloraya, program director of the Russian Academy of Science's Korean Institute of Economics, has extended his line of thought to cover the Obama administration when he wrote that, "The current cycle of tensions leading to the emergence of the DPRK as a de-facto nuclear weapons state started when ... North Koreans grew frustrated as their actual gains from the diplomatic process were marginal - they did not come much closer to obtaining substantial security guarantees." As a result, "Kim Jong-il probably considered that the incoming Obama administration would not take North Korea seriously enough" unless a "strategy of increasing tensions to raise the stakes was

³⁹- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Transcript of Remarks and Response to Media Questions by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov at Joint Press Conference Following Talks with Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Korea Yu Myung-hwan, Moscow, September 10, 2008," September 11, 2008, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bccb3/4a2a8860726c0b94c32574c10048e635?OpenDocument.

⁴⁰- See for example "Russia Wants N. Korea Nuclear Talks to Resume Despite Setbacks," *RIA Novosti*, February 6, 2008, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20080206/98528664.html>.

⁴¹- "Russia's Lavrov Says N. Korea Talks Unlikely to Restart Soon," *RIA Novosti*, April 23, 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090423/121262691.html>.

adopted.”⁴²

Korea and Russian Modernization

If the DPRK can normalize its relations with other countries, Russian officials and businesses can use its territory as a means for achieving their regional integration objectives. Russian policy makers are eager to deepen their country’s connections with the prosperous East Asian region, which will enhance the health of the Russian national economy in general and the RFE’s economic recovery in particular. Medvedev and Putin have both stressed the need to promote eastern Russia’s economic modernization by deepening Russia’s integration into the Asia-Pacific region. One reason the Russian government lobbied to host the 2012 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Vladivostok was to stimulate this process through an expected surge in foreign investment to prepare the local infrastructure to host the gathering. Russia’s trade with the major East Asian countries of China, Japan, and South Korea lags far behind these three states’ economic exchanges with one another. The RFE itself trails western Russia economically and is becoming a security liability due to its diminishing ethnic Russian population, which creates troublesome demographic imbalance along the Russia-China border. Securing greater Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean trade and investment would help stimulate the growth and modernization of Russia.

Even with the persistent security tensions, economic cooperation between Russia and South Korea has increased dramatically during the

⁴²-Georgy Toloraya, “Engaging the DPRK: A ‘Deferred Delivery’ Option?” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, No. 47-3-09, November 23, 2009, <http://japanfocus.org/-Georgy-Toloraya/3258>.

past decade. The commerce involves primarily the exchange of Russian oil and gas in return for ROK machinery and equipment. The South Korean military also purchases some Russian defense equipment. The two governments are seeking to deepen their bilateral economic cooperation as well as extend it into other sectors. Russian officials are particularly eager to encourage high-tech ROK companies to increase their investment in Russia and thereby promote Russia's economic modernization.

Despite the low level of recent Russia-DPRK commerce, Russian policy makers and entrepreneurs have visions of transforming North Korea into a pivotal player in their vision of reviving the Russian Far East and integrating Russia more deeply into the prosperous Asia-Pacific region. Foreign Minister Lavrov and other Russians hope that the six-party talks could resolve the Korean nuclear dispute and establish peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula, spurring "the development of Russia's Far East and Siberia regions."⁴³ For example, Russian planners want to construct energy pipelines between Russia and South Korea across North Korean territory.⁴⁴

In addition, Russian policy makers have sought to link the Trans-Siberian and Trans-Korean railroads. The intent is to create the longest Euro-Asian land transportation corridor, with a length of more than 10,000 kilometers. The construction of such a link would allow Russia to become a transit country for South Korean trade with Europe, which now involves mostly by ocean shipping.⁴⁵ Experts believe that the

⁴³ - *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ - "Seoul Proposes Peace, Economic Ties with Russia, N. Korea," *RIA Novosti*, January 21, 2008, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20080121/97457751.html>; "Putin Reiterates Readiness to Assist Korean Projects - 1," *RIA Novosti*, October 9, 2007, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20071009/83115826.html>.

⁴⁵ - "Russia, China Could Open Rail Link."

corridor will reduce the time needed for containers to move from the Asia-Pacific region to Europe from six weeks by sea to less than two weeks by rail.⁴⁶

Russia has made some progress in establishing these rail links. In March 2006, the railway ministers of Russia and both Koreas decided at a meeting in Vladivostok to rebuild 54 kilometers of the Trans-Korean railway running from the Russian border station of Khasan to the DPRK port of Rajin and to construct a major container terminal there. The PRC might also join this transit network. In November 1998, Russia, China, and North Korea signed a treaty to demarcate their territorial waters on the Tumen River, which borders the three countries.⁴⁷ Both Russia and the PRC have aggressively developed transportation routes to the free economic trade zone in the port city of Rason.⁴⁸ In 2009, Russia went further and pledged to spend \$201.8 million to restore the railroad and renovate the city's largest port.⁴⁹ China is constructing a new highway to complement its existing rail networks to the zone.⁵⁰ In early January 2010, Kim Jong-il visited the zone and designated Rason a "special city."⁵¹ Furthermore, in April 2009, a Russian and a Chinese company signed an agreement building a line between Russia's Khasan, the North Korean border town of Tumangang, and China's Tumen. Before the onset of the latest crisis, they had hoped a North Korea company would join them in

⁴⁶ - "Russia Reconstructs Four Railway Stations in North Korea," *APN News*, January 28, 2011, <http://apnnews.com/2011/01/28/russia-reconstructs-4-railway-stations-in-nkorea/>

⁴⁷ - "China, Russia, N. Korea Sign Border Demarcation Deal," *Kyodo News*, November 9, 1998, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0WDQ/is_1998_Nov_9/ai_53217636/

⁴⁸ - Kim Sue-young, "Kim Jong-il Inspects Free Economic Zone," *Korea Times*, December 17, 2009, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2009/12/120_57504.html.

⁴⁹ - "North Names Rason as 'Special City,'" *JoongAng Daily*, January 6, 2010, <http://joongangdaily.joins.com/article/view.asp?aid=2914895>.

⁵⁰ - Leonid Petrov, "Future of ROK-Russian Ties," *Korea Times*, February 26, 2008, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2009/12/198_19633.html.

⁵¹ - "North Names Rason as 'Special City.'"

May 2009.⁵² In January 2010, Russian and DPRK specialists finished reconstructing the railway stations at Tumangang, Chokchi, Kurenphen, and Wonsan that connect Khasan to Rajin. They are now rebuilding the tunnels and electric supply networks for the railway extension.⁵³

Russian policy makers describe their involvement in these regional economic projects as contributing to East Asia's peace and security as well as regional prosperity. As Ambassador Ivashentsov asserted in January of 2009 with reference to these ventures, "There is no better way than long-term economic projects to rebuild trust between North and South Korea."⁵⁴ Even so, these proposals' implementation awaits normalization of the security situation on the Korean Peninsula. The DPRK's continuing frictions with the international community have blocked the potentially lucrative projects under Russian consideration. Until then, Moscow's economic ties and influence in Pyongyang will lag far behind that of South Korea and China, which provides North Korea with most of its foreign assistance in the form of energy, food, and other key commodities. While the DPRK can survive the absence of economic ties with Russia; China's economic assistance is indispensable.

Conclusion

Russian officials seek to change Pyongyang's behavior, but not its regime. They oppose North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles programs, but they fear even more actions that might engender

⁵²- "Russia, China Could Open Rail Link via N. Korea This Year," *RIA Novosti*, April 22, 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/business/20090422/121246937.html>.

⁵³- "Russia Reconstructs Four Railway Stations."

⁵⁴- Kim Se-jeong, "North Korea's Military Action Is Intolerable, Russian Amb. Says," *Korea Times*, January 21, 2009, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/special/2009/01/178_38277.html 27.

chaos on the Korean Peninsula. They remain more concerned about the potential for the DPRK's immediate collapse than about its government's intransigence regarding its nuclear or missile development programs. North Korea's disintegration could induce widespread economic disruptions in East Asia, generate large refugee flows across their borders, weaken their influence in the Koreas by ending their mediating status as interlocutors with Pyongyang, and potentially remove a buffer zone separating their frontiers from American ground forces based in South Korea. At worst, North Korea's demise could precipitate a military conflict on the peninsula – which could spill across into their territory. Almost any conceivable armed clash on the Korean Peninsula would worsen Russia's relations with the parties to the conflict. Of course, war on the Korean Peninsula, especially one that saw the use of nuclear weapons, would inflict incalculable economic, security, and other costs on Russia and its people.

Like South Koreans, Russians favor a “soft landing” for the DPRK – a gradual mellowing of its domestic and especially foreign policies, including its renunciation of nuclear weapons. Such a benign outcome would avoid the feared consequences of precipitous regime change – humanitarian emergencies, economic reconstruction, arms races, and military conflicts. Yet, Russian policy makers do not favor Korea's near-term reunification. In such a case, the substantial ROK investment flowing into Russia would be redirected toward North Korea's rehabilitation. Considerable PRC investment capital would also likely be diverted. Russian policy makers would strongly oppose the redeployment northward of U.S. military forces in the newly unified Korean state. Many Koreans would want them to remain to balance the country's militarily more powerful neighbors – China, Japan, and Russia. Although many of these countries' leaders might prefer that American forces remain to discourage the new Korean government to pursue nuclear weapons – an

otherwise logical move in such circumstances – certain Russians would undoubtedly object to having U.S. forces deployed in a country that borders the Russian Federation.

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