

Russia's Policy in Northeast Asia and the Prospects for Korean Unification*

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Russia's policy towards Northeast Asia cannot be understood independently of its general Asian strategy, primarily its pivot to Asia, which has practically become an official policy after 2014. There are various views about when this pivot actually began. Some see it in the distant past; others claim it dates back to the second half of the 1990s when Russia's leadership became disappointed with the one-sided policy of the West; still others link it to the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis in 2014.

Russia's general strategy is based on the fact that the international system is gravitating towards multipolarity. It is trying to create its own independent Eurasian center of power in the multipolar world of the future and build constructive and equidistant relations with other major powers. For Russia, the maintenance of security and stability in East Asia is not only a foreign policy goal, it directly involves the resolution of an internal strategic problem—the development of its Far Eastern regions.

It will be easier for Russia to deal with the new "leftist" government in Seoul. Most Russian experts do not share the opinion of some of their Western colleagues who expect an imminent collapse of the North Korean regime. It is hard to say what the relationship between Russia and the United States will be like. On the whole, it is clear that Russia will continue to facilitate a peaceful resolution of the nuclear issue. It will have no major objections to reunification and, regardless of its confrontation with the West, will closely work on this issue with China, which is unlikely to be happy about reunification for its own reasons.

Keywords: Russia, East Asia, Korea, USA, China

* The research for this article was supported by a grant from the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs of the National Research University - Higher School of Economics in 2017.

Russia's policy towards Northeast Asia cannot be understood independently of its general Asian strategy, primarily its pivot to Asia which has practically become an official policy after 2014. There are various views about when this pivot actually began. Some see it in the distant past; others claim it dates back to the second half of the 1990s when Russia's leadership became disappointed with the one-sided policy of the West; still others link it to the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis in 2014. Without going into detail, we can say that Russia has long considered itself part of Europe and generally part of the Western world, at least since the 18th century. At the same time, it has always been aware of the geopolitical realities and while moving eastward, constantly sought to establish relations with Asian states, mainly in order to secure its eastern borders and use trade and economic cooperation with them for developing its own remote eastern regions. Such attempts were made in Soviet times and of late, but the crisis in Ukraine has created a new reality and atmosphere of deep mistrust with its European partners. This gave a serious boost to Russia's pivot to Asia, which before 2014 was no more than a tendency but afterwards became a fait accompli.

Russia's general strategy is based on the fact that the international system is gravitating towards multipolarity. It is trying to create its own independent Eurasian center of power in the multipolar world of the future and build constructive and equidistant relations with other major powers. However, having encountered extreme hostility and a serious threat from the most powerful American-European center in recent years, Russia is trying to coordinate its efforts against this threat together with other centers of power, primarily the Asian ones (China, India), other BRICS members, and non-Western international organizations (the SCO, ASEAN).

Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov, who oversees the country's Asian policy, says Russia plays a major constructive role in Asia. "Russia does not seek to rearrange the balance of power in its own favor but wants to build a system of interstate relations in the region that would guarantee stability and prosperity for all. We have no doubt that the modern regional architecture should be based on the principles of inclu-

sive economic cooperation, and equal and indivisible security.”¹

Moscow's general approach to problems of security in East Asia was formulated by Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov at the plenary session of the 6th EAS on November 19, 2011, when he declared: “The strategic goals of Russia in East Asia are to help secure peace, stability, and prosperity here, to strengthen mutual trust and assist sustainable economic development. This positive agenda, in its turn, is intended to facilitate Russia's integration into the regional architecture of security and cooperation, the task of modernizing its economy and the uplift of Siberia and the Russian Far East.”²

Thus, for Russia, the maintenance of security and stability in East Asia is not only a foreign policy goal, it directly involves the resolution of an internal strategic problem—the development of its Far Eastern regions. Russians express concern over the intensification of contradictions between traditional and newly-rising players in the region, and the lack of a comprehensive system of security, such as there exists in Europe.

A year later, at the 7th EAS held in 2012, Lavrov introduced the idea of a multilateral dialogue on the formation of a sustained and reliable architecture of security and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, and the need to work out a range of framework principles for interstate relations.³ According to the explanations of Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov, while drafting this document, its Russian authors were guided by international and regional instruments in the field of security based on universally recognized norms. They also employed provisions

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1. Igor Morgulov, “Vostochnaya politika Rossii v 2016 gpdu: resul'taty i perspektivy” [Russia's Eastern Policy in 2016: Results and Prospects]. *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn'*, No. 2, 2017. <<https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/1799>> (date accessed June 17, 2017).
 2. Statement by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the 6th East Asia Summit Plenary Session, Bali, Indonesia, November 19, 2011. <http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/182318?p_i> (date accessed June 17, 2017).
 3. Speech of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Sergey V. Lavrov at the plenary session of the Seventh East Asia Summit, Phnom Penh, November 20, 2012. <http://www.mid.ru/press_service/minister_speeches/-/asset_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/134194> (date accessed June 17, 2017).

of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia of 1976 and the EAS Declaration on Principles for Mutually Beneficial Relations adopted at the 6th EAS in November 2011 as well as a number of main ideas contained in the Russian-Chinese Joint Initiative on Strengthening Security in the Asia Pacific of 2010. Morgulov also pointed out that as a long-term objective Russia sees a legally binding document on security in the “Greater Asia Pacific.”⁴

Thus, Russia aims not to create a new structure of security in the region, such as the OECD, but to work out some principles on the basis of the experience of the existing structures. Yet none of these directly covers Northeast Asia.

North Korea and Russia’s Policy in Northeast Asia

Northeast Asia as a region is the closest to Russia and, naturally, is always the focus of its attention. Countries located in this region—China, Japan, and South Korea—are its major Asian trade partners. According to Igor Morgulov, Russia believes that the situation in Northeast Asia gives cause for serious concern since instability factors are increasing. One of the main factors he mentioned was the situation on the Korean Peninsula.⁵

For the geopolitical and economic reasons stated above, Moscow is developing increasingly close relations with Beijing. Russian-Chinese rapprochement has become the basis for consolidating and developing numerous formats of cooperation in the region, such as the SCO, the integration of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Silk Road Economic Belt initiative, the emerging comprehensive Eurasian partnership (or

4. Igor V. Morgulov, *Russia Reconnecting with East Asia*, 27th Asia Pacific Roundtable, 3-5 May 2013, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. <http://isis.org.my/attachments/apr27/PS7_Igor_V_MORGULOV.pdf> (date accessed June 17, 2017).

5. Interview by Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov with Jiji Press news agency, Japan, March 17, 2017. <http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/maps/jp/-/asset_publisher/zMUqsVU9NDU/content/id/2694158> (date accessed June 17, 2017).

Greater Eurasia), and consolidation of the BRICS group. Nevertheless, seeking to diversify its ties, Russia is also trying to develop and deepen cooperation with other countries in the region. Much success has been achieved in relations with Japan, especially during Shinzo Abe's premiership. They were formalized and furthered during President Vladimir Putin's visit to Japan in December 2016, when apart from major progress in trade, economic, and investment cooperation, the leaders of the two countries also made a statement concerning joint business activities on the disputed South Kuril Islands, which Japan calls its Northern Territories.

As for South Korea, Russia greatly appreciates its refusal to join anti-Russian sanctions and develops cooperation with it in many areas. One of the most important area involves joint efforts to find a solution to the Korean peninsular nuclear issue.

Support for the international regime against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction has been repeatedly confirmed as an official goal of Russian foreign policy. Russia's inclusion in international sanctions against Iran and North Korea, despite its desire to weaken them, is the strongest reaction in its history to the fact of proliferation or its possibility. This is due to three factors.

First, as is officially declared, as one of the most influential members of the nuclear club and a major world power, Russia bears special responsibility for maintaining world security and resists any attempts to undermine it through WMD proliferation. Second, Moscow well understands that countries that are acquiring or could acquire these weapons, above all Iran and North Korea, are its neighbors, and their entry into the nuclear club creates a direct threat to Russia's territory. Third, considering the reduced capacity of Russia's conventional weapons, nuclear weapons have become ever more important for it as a means of containment. Moreover, in conditions of reduced economic and political influence compared to Soviet times, nuclear parity with the United States remains the only attribute of a superpower, putting Moscow on par with Washington. The spread of nuclear weapons significantly devalues Russia's role and influence in the world.

The Korean Peninsula and Russia's Approach to Northeast Asia

Moscow continues to actively participate in the political process for resolving the nuclear crisis on the peninsula; it has consistently condemned North Korea's missile launches and nuclear ambitions, and supports the UN position on these issues (for example, on North Korea's missile launches in July 2006 and a nuclear test conducted in October of that year). Russia directly participated in preparing Security Council Resolutions 1695 and 1718, which introduced sanctions against Pyongyang and called on it to stop its nuclear programs, and also in Resolutions 1874 (2009) and 2094 (March 2013), which toughened these sanctions. Moscow also supported Resolution 2270 (March 2016) after North Korea conducted a fourth nuclear test, and Resolution 2321 (November 2016) which further strengthened sanctions.

Russian diplomats say that Russia strictly and fully observes all of the UN Security Council restrictions aimed at stopping North Korea's nuclear programs. The latest report released by a group of experts from the UN 1718 Sanctions Committee (DPRK), which monitors how countries comply with Security Council resolutions, did not make a single complaint about Russia, which convincingly proves Russia's commitment to its obligations.⁶

At the same time, one should not ignore the fact that relations with other anti-Western regimes, no matter what they are, become increasingly valuable for Moscow amid its confrontations with the West.

For this reason, as Russian Ambassador to North Korea Alexander Matsegora has stated, Russia consistently abides by the essence and spirit of the understanding reached by the UN Security Council members: "These restrictions, no matter how harsh they are, must not have a negative impact on the socio-economic development of the DPRK and the lives of its people. So we do not recognize any of the additional sanctions imposed against Pyongyang by certain countries outside the Secu-

6. Alexander Matsegora: koreyskie problemy možno reshat' tol'ko mirnym putyom [Alexander Matsegora: Korea's Problems can be Only Solved by Peaceful Means], TASS, February 10, 2017. <<http://tass.ru/opinions/interviews/4012956>> (date accessed June 17, 2017).

rity Council (such as the EU), consider them illegitimate and, therefore, ignore them.”⁷

Russia is utterly critical of Pyongyang's actions, but it also lays blame on the opposite side as it strongly believes that the United States is trying to make use of these tensions for achieving its own goals in the regions. For example, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov expressed regret that “Lately there have been no indications of easing tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Despite the position of the international community, which was reflected in the Security Council's resolutions on the issue, Pyongyang continues to develop its missile and nuclear capacity. This in turn is being used by the opponents of the DPRK as a pretext for stepping up military activities and deploying advanced military equipment in the region.”⁸ He also condemned the tests of intercontinental ballistic missiles which were being prepared at the time, stressing that they would cause a consolidated response in the world”.⁹

In a March 2017 comment, the Russian Foreign Ministry cited both North Korea's missile launch on March 6 and the start of large-scale joint exercises by U.S. and South Korean armed forces “modelling offensive operations against North Korea” as the two events aggravating the situation on the Korean Peninsula and called all parties concerned to show restraint and to seek comprehensive political and diplomatic solutions.¹⁰

Most Chinese experts believe that while the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) in South Korea is useless against Pyongyang and Russia, the sophisticated radar capabilities included in it could be used to track China's missile systems. This would give the United States a major

7. *Ibid.*

8. Interv'y u zamestitelya Ministra inostrannykh del Rossii I.V.Morgulova agentstvu “Interfax” [Interview of Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia I.V.Morgulov with Interfax News Agency], February 10, 2017. <http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2634790> (date accessed June 17, 2017).

9. *Ibid.*

10. Comment by the Information and Press Department on the situation on the Korean Peninsula, 6 March, 2017 <http://www.mid.ru/en/maps/kp/-/asset_publisher/VJy7Ilg5QaAII/content/id/2668115> (date accessed June 17, 2017).

advantage in any future conflict with China.¹¹ According to Major General Luo Yuan, a researcher at the Chinese Military Science Academy, the U.S. is “building an encirclement of anti-missile systems around China, and the only missing link is the Korean peninsula.”¹² This is an obvious case of the U.S. anti-Chinese military strategy that stimulates Russia’s support for China and Russian-Chinese military cooperation. Russia supports this view as a matter of principle and out of solidarity with China.

In Russia there is also a widespread opinion that the deployment of the U.S. THAAD system in South Korea is aimed not so much against North Korea, but against China. According to a leading Russian expert, Georgy Toloraya, Russia should recognize that China expressed great concern on the THAAD issue and had “all good reasons, because the system, and, more precisely, its radar and warning devices actually cover the entirety of North-Eastern China at a distance of 2000 kilometers”. In his view, this “reduces the possibility of a retaliatory blow from China, and thus violates the strategic balance in the region.”¹³

So, Russia and China jointly opposed U.S. plans to deploy THAAD missiles in South Korea. Officials of both countries condemned this plan on many occasions in 2015 and 2016. In March 2016 Foreign Ministers Sergei Lavrov and Wang Yi at a joint press-conference warned that they will respond. Wang Yi said that Beijing believed these plans “to be directly damaging to Russian and Chinese strategic [national] security” and that “such plans go beyond the defense requirements in the region, violate the strategic balance, and would lead to a new arms race.” Lavrov called

11. Adam Taylor, “Why China is so mad about THAAD, a missile defense system aimed at deterring North Korea,” *The Washington Post*, March 7, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/03/07/why-china-is-so-mad-about-thaad-a-missile-defense-system-aimed-at-deterring-north-korea/?utm_term=.d5c410707fba> (date accessed June 17, 2017).

12. Zhang Yunbi, “China, Russia to hold first joint anti-missile drill,” *China Daily*, 05.05.2016. <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/cn_eu/2016-05/05/content_25067674.htm> (date accessed June 17, 2017).

13. Georgy Tolotaya, “Deployment of US Missile Defense System in South Korea Revives Ghosts of the Cold War,” *Valdai Discussion Club*, July 7, 2016. <<http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/south-korea-ghosts-of-the-Cold-war/>> (date accessed June 17, 2017).

on the U.S. and South Korea “not to shelter behind the excuse that this [deployment] is taking place because of the North Korean reckless ventures.”¹⁴

After the deployment began, the Russian Foreign Ministry commented that this course of events “may have grave consequences for global and regional strategic stability. A new destructive factor is emerging in Asia Pacific, which may aggravate an already tense security situation in the region by undermining efforts to find solutions to the nuclear and other issues confronting the Korean Peninsula and triggering an arms race in the region, including with respect to missiles.”¹⁵

At a meeting with South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se on February 18, 2017 Sergei Lavrov expressed a need to “renounce policies aiming to build up the regional military infrastructure and address the existing issues by force,” and called for “a collective search for solutions to various issues by political and diplomatic means” in order to ease tensions in Northeast Asia.¹⁶

In the negotiations on the conditions of sanctions, Russia, like China, usually tried to soften the sanction regime. This is linked to two factors. First, in the Russian leadership there is real fear that the sanctions will lead to an uncontrollable breakdown of the North Korean regime. In this case, Russia as a neighboring state will face a whole range of problems, from the possibility of a nuclear threat caused by North Korean nuclear weapons falling into the hands of uncontrolled groups to a massive flood of refugees into its territory. To these prob-

14. N. Korean nuclear issue should not be pretext for America to deploy air defenses in region – Lavrov, RT, 11 March, 2016. < <https://www.rt.com/news/335211-north-korea-nuclear-russia-china/> > (date accessed June 17, 2017).

15. Comment by the Information and Press Department on the deployment of a US missile defence system in South Korea, 9 March, 2017. < http://www.mid.ru/en/maps/kr/-/asset_publisher/PR7UbfssNImL/content/id/2670833 > (date accessed June 17, 2017).

16. Press release on Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s meeting with Republic of Korea Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se, 18 February, 2017. < http://www.mid.ru/en/maps/kr/-/asset_publisher/PR7UbfssNImL/content/id/2648135 > (date accessed June 17, 2017).

lems one can add that military actions on an even larger scale could occur on the peninsula. Second, within the ruling elite there still exists strong emotions from the time of the Cold War, in accord with which the DPRK is, whether irresponsible or not, a partner in confronting attempts by the USA and its allies to dominate Asia. From this point of view, its complete disappearance from the map of the world is seen as harmful.

Moscow's actual position is intermediate between these groups. It supports international forces to restrain North Korea's nuclear program, but it has taken a comparatively soft approach. Russia actively participates in solving conflicts on the Korean Peninsula through negotiations. Not opposing direct negotiations between Pyongyang and Washington that may lead to normalization and Russia prefers a multilateral process with Moscow playing an active role. Russia attaches special importance to the Six-Party Talks on the North Korean nuclear program, the significance of which must be seen in the context of its general policy in Asia.

Russia had big hopes for the Six-Party Talks, where it headed a working group and believed it would be able to work out security measures for Northeast Asia. It assumed that after resolving the North Korean nuclear problem this group could turn into a continuously functioning mechanism in support of security in the region that is important for Russia. The interruption of these talks naturally buried these hopes. Russia insistently calls for a continuation of the Six-Party Talks, seeing in them not only a means for resolving a concrete problem, but for a wider perspective in support of security in Northeast Asia as part of the future structure of security in the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, in which it could play the leading role. Of course, Moscow would welcome any resolution of the North Korean nuclear problem, including direct negotiations between Pyongyang and Washington; however, a six-party mechanism would be most desirable in all respects.

Russia calls for resuming Six-Party Talks despite Pyongyang's skepticism and its expressed desire to conduct direct negotiations only with the United States. Russia believes that "for all the importance of

the North Korean-U.S. contacts, the nuclear and other Korean Peninsular problems can be resolved only by building a reliable mechanism for maintaining peace and security in Northeast Asia. This means that all countries in the region should jointly work on creating a mechanism and, thereby a formula for resolving the Korean Peninsular nuclear issue as its essential part.¹⁷

In the current situation, Russia urges all of the countries concerned to show restraint and refrain from actions that could bring the world to the point of no return. According to Morgulov, Moscow is ready for constructive cooperation with all interested sides in order to resume negotiations as soon as possible, but this will require Washington and Pyongyang to show their readiness as well. It will be impossible to resolve the current stalemate without that.¹⁸ "We propose to look at the situation in a comprehensive way in order to break the vicious circle of tensions, when in response to North Korean nuclear missile "experiments" the U.S. and its allies step up exercises and other military activities, which in turn prompt Pyongyang to take new defiant actions. Our common goal is to ensure the solution of the problems of the Korean Peninsula by peaceful political and diplomatic means in the context of general military and political de-escalation, the creation of a durable peace mechanism that would provide solid security guarantees for all the countries in the region," — Morgulov told the Japanese Jiji Press news agency in March 2017.¹⁹

Morgulov believes that the Korean Peninsular problems, including the nuclear one, necessitate a comprehensive solution. Denuclearization can only be achieved by easing military-political tensions and dismantling the confrontational architecture in Northeast Asia. But doing so will require all parties to give up old stereotypes and take an innovative approach.²⁰

17. Alexander Matsegora: koreyskie problemy mozhno reshat' tol'ko mirrym putyom.

18. Interv'yū zamestitelya Ministra inostrannykh del Rossii I.V.Morgulova agentstvu "Interfax."

19. "Interview by Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov with Jiji Press news agency.

20. Interv'yū zamestitelya Ministra inostrannykh del Rossii I.V.Morgulova agentstvu "Interfax."

Opinions on the Prospects for Unification

It would be an exaggeration to say that the Russian leadership is seriously thinking about the prospects and consequences of the possible unification of Korea. As any other government, it is weighed down by its own current problems. The official position is to support the establishment of one democratic Korea, for which it believes that the Koreans themselves must decide through which scenario unification will proceed and how it will occur. Perhaps the clearest expression of this position came from the Russian Ambassador to South Korea, Konstantin Vnukov, at the Diplomat's Roundtable in May 2011: "The matter is that the situation on the Korean peninsula directly affects security of the Russian citizens, who live in the neighboring Far East regions, influences the large-scale rapid development plans of these Russian territories. By the way, from this point of view establishment in the future of the democratic, prosperous and friendly towards us united Korea fully reflects Russian political and economical interests."²¹

The prospects for Korean reunification are widely discussed by experts with various opinions. The dominant view is that, for Russia as a whole, the establishment of a single, powerful Korean state is beneficial. From an economic point of view, this would be a trade partner, whose level of development would be more favorable for cooperation with Russia, than, for example, with a more developed Japan, but at the same time possesses more contemporary technology than China. In the political sphere, Russia has never had serious conflicts with Korea, and it has no border problems. Additionally, there are no fears about a Korean migration to Russia (as opposed to China), since Korea, on the whole, is more developed, and in the past Korean migrants showed their best side; they quickly assimilated and contributed significantly to the Russian economy. From the point of view of geopolitics, a more powerful, united Korea can become a useful counterweight to a rising China, and will likely conduct a more independent foreign policy since the threat

21. Speech of the Ambassador of the Russian Federation, H.E. Mr. K.Vnukov at the Diplomat's Roundtable, May 29, 2011. <http://russian-embassy.org/en/?p=591> (date accessed June 30, 2017).

of war from the north would disappear, as would the need to rely on Washington for its defense.²²

The majority of experts note that Korean reunification is a matter for the distant future since the governments of both Korean states, which use nationalist slogans for propagandistic aims, in fact, fear unification. They note that since unification, more likely than not, would proceed in the form of South Korea swallowing the North, as was the case, for example, with Western Germany absorbing Eastern Germany, the North Korean elite is fearful of losing their power and privileges and even of being charged with crimes against their nation. The South Koreans do understand that unification with such an extremely backward state would require enormous outlays and, possibly, lead to political and social instability.²³ They also noted that unification would hardly be allowed by China, unwilling to lose a “socialist” ally and gain in its place a rather strong economic and geopolitical competitor.²⁴ Only a small percentage of experts with the most pro-West and anti-North Korean attitudes believe that the crisis in the DPRK is so deep that unification will occur in the near future. There are, however, some doubters to whether a unified Korea would be useful for Russia.²⁵ Above all, these are politicians and

22. S.V. Khamutaeva, “Problema ob’edineniia Korei v Rossiiskoi istoriografii,” [The Problem of Korean Unification in Russian Historiography], *Vestnik Buriatskogo gosuniversiteta*, No. 8, 2010, pp. 252-55. <<http://www.bsu.ru/content/pages2/1073/2010/HamutaevaSV2.pdf>> (date accessed June 17, 2017); Alexander Lukin, “Russia’s Korea Policy in the 21st Century,” *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol.18, No.2 (2009), pp. 43-46.

23. Andrei Lan’kov, “Tsugtsvang Pkhen’iana: Pochemu Severnaia Koreia ne poidet Kitaiskim putem” [Pyongyang’Stalemate: Why North Korea will not Follow China’s Example], *Rossiiia v global’noi politike*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2013), pp. 187-97. <<http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Tcugtcvang-Pkhenyana-15962>>> (date accessed June 17, 2017).

24. “Komu nuzhna edinaia Koreia?” [Who needs a United Korea?] *Radio “Golos Rossii,”* August 16, 2010. <<http://rus.ruvr.ru/2010/08/16/15981397/>>> (date accessed June 17, 2017).

25. Konstantin Asmolov, “Ob’edinenie Koreia—kakie problemy stoit ozhidat,” [Korea’s Unification: What Problems One Should Expect?] Part 2,» NEO, April 15, 2013. <<http://ru.journal-neo.org/2013/04/15/korean-unification-what-problems-should-we-expect-part-2/>>>(date accessed June 17, 2017).

experts close to communists and nationalists, who do not want to lose one of the last fortresses of world communism and a determined battler with the hegemony of the West. As a model of unification, should it happen all the same, they suggest various forms of confederation and speak of the need for unity through a new state in the South as in the North.

Possible Changes under Trump and New Leaders in Seoul

We are witnessing two contradictory tendencies in Washington and Seoul. The Trump administration seeks to assume a tougher stance on North Korea. At the same time, South Korea's new government is likely to be more moderate towards Pyongyang.

The official Russian reaction to the election of the new president in South Korea was positive but it did not go beyond the usual protocol. President Putin sent a congratulatory telegram to Moon Jae-in, praising fruitful bilateral relations and confirming readiness for joint work for a build-up of cooperation in various areas.²⁶

At the same time Russian experts expressed considerable hope. Georgy Toloraya maintained that the new government in Seoul would try to change its relationship with most of its major partners. According to Toloraya, Park Geun-hye spoiled relations with practically everyone: North Korea, China, and Japan. Only relations with the U.S. remained normal, although this is something that Park was blamed for. Moon Jae-in's main change would be improving relations with Pyongyang. This would be "not the result of tactical thinking, but his deep convictions"²⁷ as a supporter of the line of Roh Moo-hyun and Kim Dae-jung. However, Toloraya doubts that Moon Jae-in's initiatives for improving relations with North Korea will be successful because of the opposition from Washington and lack of interest in

26. "Putin congratulates new South Korean president," TASS, May 10, 2017. <<http://tass.com/politics/945150>> (date accessed June 17, 2017).

27. Georgy Toloraya, "What Issues does the South Korea's New President Face?" *Valdai Discussion Club*, 12 May, 2017, <http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/south-korea-new-president/>.

Pyongyang.

Among other possible changes Toloraya mentions improving relations with China which is a must since China is its first trading partner, and with Japan, although he is sceptical about the ability of the new president to renegotiate agreements with the U.S. on anti-missile system deployments because of U.S. opposition. However, "some compromises are possible. It may be possible to turn Chinese irritation toward the U.S., but relations with a key partner are a very serious foreign policy issue. South Korea will need to preserve relations with Trump, but at the same time not become pressured by the new administration, which is decisive regarding both the North Korea situation and the idea that South Korea should pay more for mutual defense. These are not simple tasks."²⁸

Russian experts began to express hopes for a serious deepening of cooperation with both North and South Korea. They mention the energy sector, building the Transpolar Sea Route, a revival of the Khasan-Rajin joint project in which Russia can participate, an electricity grid in North-east Asia reaching to South Korea, China, and Japan, which in September 2016 was supported by Putin at the Eastern Economic Forum, and generally building mutual cooperation between Moscow, Pyongyang, and Seoul.²⁹

Most Russian experts do not share the opinion of some of their Western colleagues who expect an imminent collapse of the North Korean regime. Alexander Matsegora believes that "attempts to base one's strategy on the expectation of its impending fall are not only far from reality but are also quite dangerous. One must talk and bargain with Pyongyang, and understand clearly that this is the partner we all will

28. Georgy Toloraya, "What Issues does the South Korea's New President Face?" *Valdai Discussion Club*, 12 May, 2017, <http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/south-korea-new-president/>.

29. Toloraya, *ibid.*, Tat'yana Shchenkova, "Bratstvo kol'tsa: smozhet li Rossiya probit'sya v elektroenergetiku Vostochnoy Asii" [Brotherhood of the Ring: Will Russia be Able to Fight Her Way into the Electrical Energy Industry of East Asia], *Moscow Carnegie Center*, May 5, 2017, <<http://carnegie.ru/commentary/69851>> (date accessed June 17, 2017).

have to deal with both in the immediate and distant future.”³⁰

It is hard to say what the relationship between Russia and the United States will be like. On the whole, it is clear that Russia will continue to facilitate a peaceful resolution of the nuclear issue. It will have no major objections to reunification and, regardless of its confrontation with the West, will closely work on this issue with China, which is unlikely to be happy about reunification for its own reasons.

■ Article Received: 4/18 ■ Reviewed: 5/17 ■ Revised: 6/18 ■ Accepted: 6/21

30. Alexander Matsegora: koreyskie problemy možno reshat' tol'ko mirrym putyom.

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