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Assessment of the China–Russia Summit and Its Effect on the Korean Peninsula

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On May 16–17, Russian President Vladimir Putin made a state visit to China and held talks with President Xi Jinping on the 16. To mark the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Russia, they issued a “Joint Statement on Deepening China–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for a New Era on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries (“Joint Statement”).

Evaluation of the China–Russia Summit and the Current State of China–Russia Relations: The Illusion of Unlimited Cooperation

In particular, the joint statement emphasized that the capabilities of Global South countries and regional emerging powers have strengthened, and that the democratization of international relations, fairness, and justice should be promoted in a direction favorable to them. Both countries highlighted the importance and active significance of the concept of a community with a shared future for humanity

proposed by China and its global initiatives.

<Table 1> Contents of China–Russia Joint Statement by Key Area

Key Area	Main Contents
Characteristics of China–Russia Relations	Non–alliance, Non–resistance, Non–targeting of a third country
Alternative International Order	Global South nations driving the democratization of international relations through their strengthened status, and advancing China’s proposed community of shared future for humanity along with the three global initiatives (security, development, and civilization)
Anti–American Coalition	Opposition to the U.S. rules–based order, unilateral sanctions and extended jurisdiction, U.S. military activities targeting China and Russia, and the use of the non–proliferation regime for political purposes to constrain Chinese military power
Issue of Korean Peninsula	Opposition to the military threats and actions by the U.S. and its allies that heighten tensions on the Korean peninsula, deletion of the solution for the issue of Korean peninsula such as denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and parallel developments in U.S.–DPRK peace treaty and denuclearization (雙軌並行)
Military	Expansion of regular joint exercises, strengthened joint response to threats, nuclear non–proliferation and prohibition of weapons of mass destruction
Economy	Digital economy and sustainable development, stability of supply chain
Energy	Stability of the global energy market, fossil fuel cooperation, renewable energy, nuclear power
Advanced Technology	Civil aircraft manufacturing, artificial intelligence, network and data security, and space technology
Others	Cooperation in outer space, Artic routes, and human rights

Source: Organized by the author based on the joint statement

The deepening of relations between the two countries is most evident in military cooperation. In particular, they emphasized expanding the scale of China–Russia joint exercises and regularly organizing joint naval and air exercises to continuously

enhance their ability and levels of joint response to threats. This poses a significant threat to the ROK-U.S. joint exercises and ROK-U.S.-Japan security cooperation. In addition to traditional fossil fuel cooperation, they are also strengthening civil nuclear energy cooperation, including thermonuclear fusion, fast neutron reactors, nuclear fuel reprocessing systems, and the construction of nuclear power plants. China-Russia nuclear cooperation is expected to support China's nuclear weapons enhancement. According to U.S. projections, China aims to increase its number of nuclear warheads to 1,500 by the modernization target of People's Liberation Army of 2035. This is a goal achievable through relevant technology cooperation with Russia.

While there is a growing consensus among China and Russia to establish a new multipolar international order replacing the U.S., Russia, in reality, appears to be actively cooperating with China on initiatives such as the community of shared future for humanity proposed by China, as well as global initiatives (development, security, and civilization), and China-led cooperative frameworks like the Belt and Road Initiative, BRICS, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. However, Russia did not secure substantive support for war operation from China beyond support for political and diplomatic resolution during this summit meeting. Finally, both China and Russia emphasized their support for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, while also stressing that the non-proliferation regime should not be exploited for political purposes unrelated to the content of the treaty. This underscores the significance of the anti-American coalition opposing U.S. pressure on China and Russia under the pretext of nuclear non-proliferation.

Absence of North Korean Nuclear Issue in China-Russia Cooperation

In the joint statement between China and Russia, there was no mention at all of the escalation of the North Korean nuclear issue and the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear and missile tests. The content related to the Korean Peninsula in this statement was completely different from the 'Joint Statement on Deepening

Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for the New Era' released during President Xi Jinping's visit to Russia in 2023. While this statement completely shifted the responsibility for tension on the Korean Peninsula to the U.S. and completely omitted the solution of 'denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula,' the 2023 joint statement still emphasized maintaining calmness and restraint by each party and reiterated China's proposed solutions to the Korean Peninsula issue, including denuclearization and parallel developments in U.S.-DPRK peace treaty and denuclearization (雙軌並行).

In other words, unlike last year, this year's joint statement from China and Russia criticizes military exercises by the U.S. and its allies without mentioning denuclearization issues or North Korea's missile provocations. The ROK-U.S. alliance and joint military exercises aim to deter North Korean nuclear missiles, but both countries perceive them as targeting China and Russia. Such perceptions and policies of China and Russia could send wrong signals to North Korea. Essentially, it could suggest to North Korea that its nuclear development and missile provocations in response to threats from the U.S. and its allies are legitimate, fostering the false belief that North Korea could gain approval for its status as a nuclear weapons state from China and Russia within the bloc. While actively exploiting this new Cold War dynamic to its advantage amid China and Russia's confrontation with the U.S., North Korea will likely seek to legitimize its nuclear escalation for political purposes. ©

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