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## CONTENTS

### *Feature Theme:*

#### *Russia's Foreign Policy and Northeast Asia*

Russian Policy toward North Korea:  
Steadfast and Changing

*Richard Weitz* ..... 1

Russia's "Turn to the East" Policy:  
Role of Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula

*Georgy Toloraya and Alexander Vorontsov* ..... 31

Russia, China and the Korean Peninsula:  
A Post-Ukraine Assessment

*Artyom Lukin* ..... 67

Russian Policy towards the Korean Unification

*Sergey Lukonin* .... 101

Ukrainian-Russian Conflict and Its Implications  
for Northeast Asia

*Olexiy Haran* .... 125

The Attitude of the United States towards the Unification  
of the Korean Peninsula

*Hyun-Wook Kim* .... 159

North Korea's Evolving Nuclear Strategy under the Pretext  
of Minimum Deterrence:  
Implications for the Korean Peninsula

*Zafar Khan* .... 181

# Contributors

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**Richard Weitz** is Senior Fellow and Director of the Center for Political-Military Analysis at Hudson Institute. His current research includes regional security developments relating to Europe, Eurasia, and East Asia as well as U.S. foreign and defense policies. Dr. Weitz is also an Expert at Wikistrat and a non-resident Adjunct Senior Fellow at the Center for a New American Security. Dr. Weitz has published or edited several books and monographs, including *Global Security Watch-China* (2013), two volumes of *National Security Case Studies* (2012 and 2008); *War and Governance: International Security in a Changing World Order* (2011); *The Russian Military Today and Tomorrow* (2010); *Global Security Watch-Russia* (2009); *China-Russia Security Relations* (2008); *Kazakhstan and the New International Politics of Eurasia* (2008); *Mismanaging Mayhem: How Washington Responds to Crisis* (2008); *The Reserve Policies of Nations: A Comparative Analysis* (2007); and *Revitalising U.S.–Russian Security Cooperation: Practical Measures* (2005). He can be reached at [Weitz@hudson.org](mailto:Weitz@hudson.org).

**Georgy Toloraya** holds the position of Executive Director of Russian National Committee on BRICS Research, a legal entity created under the auspices of Russian government for Track 2 activities. He is also Chair of Regional Programs at “Russkiy Mir” Presidential Foundation, dealing with international programs in Asia and Africa. Professor Toloraya is concurrently the Director of Asian Strategy Center at the Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He is a professional diplomat (rank of Minister) with decades-long experience in Asian affairs, having served two postings in North Korea (1977-1980 and 1984-1987), then in South Korea as a Deputy chief of the Russian Embassy (1993-1998) and later as the senior Russian Foreign Ministry official (Deputy director-general of the First Asian Department) (1998-2003). He later worked as the Consul General of Russia in Sydney, Australia (2003-2007). Prior to that, he worked for trade promotion agencies related to Asia. Professor Toloraya pursued a successful scholarly career, having graduated from MGIMO (Moscow University of International Relations) in 1978, earning a Ph.D. in 1984, Doctor of

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Economy degree in 1994 and a Full Professor degree in Oriental studies in 2002. He can be reached at [rusmirasaf@yandex.ru](mailto:rusmirasaf@yandex.ru).

**Alexander Vorontsov**, Ph.D. (History) is currently the head of the Department for Korean and Mongolian Studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russia Academy of Sciences and the MGIMO-University associate professor. He also holds post as Russian Military Science Academy Professor. He repeatedly takes part in the “track 1.5” conferences dealing with the security situation on the Korean Peninsula and East Asia. He was a visiting professor at the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul from 1998 to 2000; at the Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, Japan in 2009 and 2012, at the Akita International University, Japan in 2015, member of faculty of Yonsei University International Summer School in Seoul in 2010; a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies in Washington D.C. in 2005-2006, graduated from Asia Pacific-Center for Security Studies Executive Courses in Honolulu in 2005. Vorontsov served as second secretary in the Russian Federation’s Embassy in Pyongyang from 2000 to 2002. He can be reached at [vorontsovav@yandex.ru](mailto:vorontsovav@yandex.ru).

**Artyom Lukin** is Associate Professor of International Relations at the School of Regional and International Studies, Far Eastern Federal University in Vladivostok, Russia. He is also Deputy Director for Research, SRIS FEFU. Lukin holds a master’s degree in International Relations and Ph.D. in Political Science from Far Eastern National University. His main research interests are international relations and international political economy in the Asia-Pacific and Northeast Asia; Russian foreign policy; Russia’s engagement with the Asia-Pacific; social, political and economic processes in the Russian Far East. Lukin has authored and co-authored over 60 scholarly publications in Russian and English. He has been involved in numerous research and publication projects both in Russia and abroad. Artyom Lukin is a regular commentator for Russian and international news media and frequent contributor to online

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publications, including *The Huffington Post*, *East Asia Forum* ([www.eastasiaforum.org](http://www.eastasiaforum.org)) and *Russian International Affairs Council* ([russiancouncil.ru](http://russiancouncil.ru)). He can be reached at [artlukin@mail.ru](mailto:artlukin@mail.ru).

**Sergey Lukonin** is the Director of Center for Chinese Economics and Politics Studies, Primakov Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), expert on the Russian-Chinese economic and political relations. He is also Professor and co-founder of the author's course in Economics of the Asia-Pacific region in the Plekhanov Russian University of Economics. Sergey Lukonin earned his Ph.D. degree from the Institute of Far Eastern Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences and Master's degree from the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences. He can be reached at [sergeylukonin@mail.ru](mailto:sergeylukonin@mail.ru).

**Olexiy Haran** is Professor of Comparative Politics and Founding Director of the School for Policy Analysis at University of KyivMohyla Academy (UKMA). Previously, he was Dean and organizer of the Faculty of Social Sciences at UKMA, and Eurasia Foundation's Regional Vice President for Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova. Since 2015, Professor Haran has also become Research Director at Democratic Initiatives Foundation, Ukrainian sociological and analytical center. He is author and co-editor of several books, including *Transatlantic Debates: The Turn of Western Europe to Détente and the Position of the USA* (1990), *The Ukrainian Left: Between Leninism and Social Democracy* (2000), *Russia and Ukraine: Ten Years of Transformation* (Moscow 2003), *Ukraine, Russia, and the End of Imperial Project* (2011). Prof. Haran is a member of Program on New Approaches to Research and Security (PONARS-Eurasia), based at George Washington University, and he has served on the boards of the Kennan Institute and of various journals, including *Pro et Contra* (Moscow). He can be reached at [haran@ukma.kiev.ua](mailto:haran@ukma.kiev.ua).

**Hyun-Wook Kim** is currently an Associate Professor at Korea National Diplomatic Academy. His research areas include U.S.-ROK alliance, U.S.-

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DPRK relations and Northeast Asian security. His Ph.D. thesis title is *Critical Junctures and Alliance Cohesion: The Post-Cold War U.S.-South Korea and U.S.-Japan Alliances*. He is now an advisory member for the National Security Council and a standing member for the National Unification Advisory Council. He was a visiting scholar at University of California, San Diego in 2014. He has finished his Ph.D. and M.A. in political science from Brown University, and worked at the University of Southern California as a postdoctoral fellow. He received his B.A. from Yonsei University. He can be reached at [hk729@hotmail.com](mailto:hk729@hotmail.com).

**Zafar Khan** (Ph.D. Nuclear and Strategic Studies, University of Hull, UK) authors the book *Pakistan Nuclear Policy: A Minimum Credible Deterrence* (London & New York: Routledge, 2015). Currently, he serves as Assistant Professor at the Department of Strategic Studies, National Defense University Islamabad. His papers have appeared in various national and international peer-reviewed journals. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the National Defense University and/or any other institutes of Pakistan. He can be reached at [zafarwafa@yahoo.com](mailto:zafarwafa@yahoo.com).



## Russian Policy toward North Korea: Steadfast and Changing\*

Richard Weitz

This paper reviews how, during the last few years, Russia has undertaken a sustained campaign to bolster its economic presence and diplomatic influence in Pyongyang. This campaign has resulted in many bilateral agreements and the launching of several economic projects. However, Russia has found it as difficult as the other DPRK interlocutors to develop influence in Pyongyang, while many of the economic projects remain unimplemented, underdeveloped, or underperforming. If successful, Russia's commercial and diplomatic engagement could temper Pyongyang's problematic external and internal behavior by reassuring its leadership, while also discouraging the DPRK from testing more nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles for fear of alienating Moscow. Or Russian support could boost North Korea's military-industrial potential, weaken the DPRK's diplomatic isolation, embolden more Pyongyang's provocations, reduce Beijing's willingness to pressure Pyongyang due to North Korea's having alternative Russian options, and delay unification by helping prolong the existence of an odious regime that tortures its own people and threatens the world.

**Keywords:** Russia, Vladimir Putin, Moscow, six-party talks, Kim Jong-un

This paper reviews how, during the last few years, Russia has undertaken a sustained campaign to bolster its economic presence and diplomatic influence in Pyongyang. This campaign has resulted in many bilateral agreements and the launching of several economic projects. However, Russia has found it as difficult as the other interlocutors of

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the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to develop influence in Pyongyang, while many of the economic projects remain unimplemented, underdeveloped, or underperforming.

Interestingly, Russia's goals regarding North Korea have been changing. Moscow's commercial and diplomatic engagement still aims to temper the DPRK's problematic external behavior by reassuring its leadership while also giving Pyongyang a stake in not alienating Russia or others through further provocations. In addition to these long-standing Russian objectives, Moscow has more recently been improving relations with the DPRK as an important component of its broader, regionwide "turn to Asia" policy designed to improve Russia's integration into East Asia's dynamic economic processes, to include non-Chinese partners. The deepening Russia-Western tensions following Moscow's March 2014 annexation of Crimea have now resulted in a growing aversion in Moscow to the possible collapse of the DPRK and Seoul-led Korean unification, which Russian policymakers fear could result in geopolitical disadvantages for their country. This change has moved Moscow's position closer to the People's Republic of China (PRC), whose government has also decided, despite evidence of some rethinking a few years ago, that preservation of the DPRK regime and Korea's division benefit Beijing's regional objectives more than the likely consequences of a Seoul-led Korean unification scenario.

Thus, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the United States should regard cautiously Moscow's deepening ties with North Korea. In theory, these ties, like those between China and the DPRK, could hopefully give Pyongyang an incentive to avoid further regional provocations if Moscow convinced Pyongyang not to risk these ties through bad behavior. However, the renewed Russian-DPRK partnership might also boost North Korea's military-industrial potential, weaken the DPRK's diplomatic isolation and therefore incentive to engage with Western partners, embolden Pyongyang's risk-taking, reduce Beijing's leverage and willingness to pressure Pyongyang due to North Korea's having alternative Russian options, and delay unification by helping prolong the existence of an odious regime that tortures its people and threatens the world.

## Elements of Continuity

During the last few years, the Russian government, following years of low-level engagement, has sustained a high-profile economic and diplomatic effort, led by President Vladimir Putin, to deepen ties with the DPRK and other Asian countries.<sup>1</sup> Russian officials have made critical concessions to resolve the Soviet debt issue that prevented new Russian-DPRK economic projects and announced various new bilateral and regional investment and transportation projects involving the two countries. In the realm of diplomacy, in 2014, Russia hosted more senior DPRK leaders than any other foreign country, ranging from North Korea's titular president to the DPRK foreign minister to the second-most senior North Korean official. Notwithstanding the recent activism, this article shows how Moscow's objectives regarding North Korea have remained fairly constant during the past two decades. These goals include averting another major war on the Korean Peninsula;<sup>2</sup> preventing DPRK actions from prompting additional countries to obtain nuclear weapons or ballistic missiles;<sup>3</sup> keeping Moscow a major player in Korean affairs and East Asia more broadly by strengthening Russian leverage in Asia;<sup>4</sup> building transportation and energy corridors through the Korean Peninsula that would deepen Russia's regional economic integration;<sup>5</sup> and freezing and eventually eliminating the DPRK's nuclear program by exclusively peaceful means.

Russian policymakers do not want North Korea to have nuclear weapons. Although Russians only consider the DPRK's nuclear pro-

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1. Doug Bandow, "Russia and North Korea Play Nice: Vladimir Putin's Ukrainian Dance with Kim Jong-un," *The World Post*, March 24, 2015.
  2. Shannon Tiezzi, "The Renaissance in Russia-North Korea Relations," *The Diplomat*, November 22, 2014.
  3. "Russia, North Korea Aim to Sign Defense Deal to Prevent Dangerous Activity," *Sputnik*, June 23, 2015.
  4. Eric Talmadge, "Why Russia Is Bolstering Ties with North Korea," *The Guardian*, August 4, 2014.
  5. "Russia, China Could Open Rail Link via N. Korea This Year," *RIA Novosti*, April 22, 2009.

gram an indirect threat, seeing no reason it would strike at Russia,<sup>6</sup> and doubt North Koreans would ever act on their rhetoric and use nuclear weapons against the United States or South Korea, they worry that Pyongyang's belligerent and erratic behavior combined with more progress in nuclear weapons development could precipitate a war through miscalculation with the ROK and the United States (on Russia's border), fear the potential for misfired DPRK missiles striking Russian territory, and are concerned about the DPRK's WMD proliferation activities, which have encompassed countries and non-state actors potentially unfriendly to Moscow. In addition, Russian policymakers fear how the DPRK's active pursuit of nuclear arms and ballistic missiles could promote the further proliferation of such technologies. In particular, Moscow wants to prevent the DPRK's actions from encouraging the ROK, Japan, and other states to pursue their own offensive and defensive strategic weapons, especially nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, and ballistic missile defenses, since these capabilities might be used to reduce the effectiveness of Russia's strike weapons. In the current atmosphere of Russia-West tensions, Russian analysts even view defensive military cooperation among South Korea, Japan, and the United States warily, expressing concern that Washington is trying to construct the same kind of regional military bloc that the U.S. leads in Europe, a Pacific version of the NATO alliance in Northeast Asia.<sup>7</sup>

Russian leaders have generally agreed with China that the negotiations aimed at constraining North Korea's nuclear arsenal should begin as soon as possible without any preconditions since talks are better than sanctions let alone military action and, in the words of Putin, "If we constantly set preconditions for the start of talks, they may never

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6. Russia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "North Korea's Nuclear Program Does Not Threaten Russia" (in Russian), November 23, 2014, [http://www.rusdialog.ru/news/9869\\_1416638139](http://www.rusdialog.ru/news/9869_1416638139).

7. Alexander Zhebin, remarks at "Russia and the Korean Peninsula: Policy and Investment Implications," YouTube videos, 1:18:27, posted by "Center for Strategic & International Studies," May 14, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2ZCGZBVVrc>.

begin.”<sup>8</sup> Russia’s role in the recent Iran nuclear deal, which has not adversely affected Tehran’s ties with Moscow, could convince many Russian leaders that Moscow might aid in the denuclearization of North Korea without sacrificing its economic and diplomatic ties with Pyongyang by contributing to a possible DPRK reconciliation with the West. However, while Moscow might accept Pyongyang’s proposal to resume the multilateral six-party talks on Korean denuclearization without preconditions, the United States and South Korea insist that North Korea must provide credible evidence that it will fulfill its obligation to end its nuclear weapons program in a verifiable manner.

Despite the novelty of Moscow’s recent activism regarding North Korea, Russian policymakers have also consistently employed several strategies and tactics regarding the DPRK. For example, they have sought to engage the DPRK in dialogue, especially through the six-party talks, while minimizing use of coercion and punishment that might harden Pyongyang’s stance or trigger abrupt regime collapse. A failed DPRK state could bring about widespread economic disruptions in East Asia, propel large refugee flights into or near Russia, weaken Moscow’s influence in both halves of the Korean Peninsula, and remove a buffer zone separating Russia from U.S. forces based in the ROK. To sustain a prominent role in the diplomatic maneuverings regarding the Korea nuclear issue until then, Russian representatives participate in joint declarations on the issue, regularly send senior Russian officials to the Koreas, and advocate dealing with Korean security issues within the framework of the six-party talks, bilateral Korean engagements, and the UN Security Council (UNSC) rather than rely primarily on Beijing’s and Washington’s direct dialogues with Pyongyang or bilateral Chinese-U.S. engagement.

There have been some recent innovations in Moscow’s strategy and tactics regarding North Korea due to the worsening ties between Russia and the West and an assessment that the Pyongyang regime is politically stable and more eager to engage with Russia economically

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8. Vladimir Putin, Interview to Korean Broadcasting System, Kremlin website, November 12, 2013, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19603>.

and diplomatically due to the DPRK's strained relations with China, the United States, and South Korea. For example, Russian officials show less concern about the DPRK's current nuclear activities and evince less support, even in principle, for unification under Seoul's leadership.<sup>9</sup> Since Russians consider the likelihood of either abrupt regime collapse or a DPRK nuclear weapons breakthrough any time soon remote, they no longer aim for a "soft landing" of the North Korean regime in which Pyongyang voluntarily surrenders its nuclear weapons and transforms its domestic and foreign policies in return for foreign economic assistance and security assurances. Instead of gradual regime change, they aim to change the regime's policies. One Russian expert has described this new goal as "conventionalizing" North Korea through a process of evolutionary but limited internal reforms and gradual changes in the DPRK's international behavior to resemble that of a normal country. These changing Russian goals and tactics, while offering insights on Moscow's current approach to international affairs, have failed to have much impact on Korean affairs yet or even achieve a major breakthrough in Moscow's economic or strategic ties with Pyongyang due primarily to North Korea's limited capacity for any foreign partnerships. However, Russia's new course might become more important should North Korea ever show greater interest in negotiating on unification, nuclear disarmament, or regional economic integration.

## **Background**

Russian policymakers perceive that they made a mistake during the 1990s when they let relations with the DPRK atrophy — ironically, this reduced Russia's appeal to South Korea, who formerly saw

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9. Georgy Toloraya, "Korean Security and Unification Dilemmas: A Russian Perspective," (Korea Economic Institute of America, Washington D.C., June 2015), <http://www.keia.org/publication/korean-security-and-unification-dilemmas-russian-perspective>.

Moscow as a potential mediator with Pyongyang. Yeltsin's successor, Vladimir Putin, sought to reverse many of his predecessor's foreign policies. An early priority was restoring Russia's influence in East Asia, including North Korea, as part of Putin's broader ambition to re-establish Russia as a great power. Whereas Yeltsin's government shunned Pyongyang in an effort to court Seoul, the Putin administration pursued more balanced relations, engaging with both Koreas to enhance Moscow's leverage with all the parties active in Korean affairs.<sup>10</sup> Although Russia's economic role in the ROK lags behind that of China and the United States, Moscow's ties with the DPRK and its membership in the six-party talks and the UN Security Council have given Russia greater leverage over Seoul. But until recently, Russia's influence in North Korea remained as marginal as that of the other foreign powers.

It has only been since Kim Jong-un took charge in Pyongyang following the abrupt death of his father, Kim Jong-il, in December 2011, and subsequently alienated China and other potential partners, that Moscow has had an opportunity to become Pyongyang's preferred diplomatic partner. Although Russian goals, strategy, and tactics regarding North Korea have remained fairly constant, their consequences have changed due to Kim's policy of seeking to improve relations with Moscow to compensate for his difficulties with Beijing and other countries. Moscow has since hosted more North Korean leaders — ranging from the country's titular president to its foreign minister to the second-most senior DPRK official — in recent years than ever in Russian history. These visits, especially prominent in 2014, also stand out given how senior DPRK leaders have shunned other potential foreign destinations. In addition to these leadership visits, Russian-North Korean diplomatic collaboration has manifested itself in mutu-

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10. Institute of history, archaeology, and ethnography of the peoples of the far-east, far-eastern branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, "The Problem of the Korean Peninsula in the Context of Russia's Integration into the Asia-Pacific Region" (in Russian), *informacionno-analitičeskij bjulleten'* [Information-analytical Bulletin] no. 10 (208), February 5, 2009, p. 4, [http://www.ihaefe.org/pacific\\_ocean\\_map/10.pdf](http://www.ihaefe.org/pacific_ocean_map/10.pdf).

ally supportive statements, such as Pyongyang's backing Moscow's position regarding Crimea, Russia blocking UN resolutions that would punish DPRK leaders for their human rights abuses, and their joint opposition to U.S.-ROK missile defense cooperation.

The Russian government has tried to consolidate its diplomatic advantage in 2015, beginning with the announcement of a "Year of Friendship" between the two countries.<sup>11</sup> In April, a meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission for Trade, Economic, Scientific, and Technological Cooperation considered proposals for bilateral cooperation in agriculture, energy, tourism, and infrastructure.<sup>12</sup> Then, with greater fanfare, the Russian government invited Kim to Moscow to take part in the May 2015 Victory Day celebrations marking the 70th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II.<sup>13</sup> Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov said such a visit "would be a logical continuation of a recently noticeably activated Russian-North Korean political dialogue [and] would contribute to the implementation of agreements reached by the parties in the economic field" and would additionally contribute to "peace on the Korean Peninsula, as well as Northeast Asia."<sup>14</sup> Through this initiative, Russia also tried to demonstrate that it retains considerable diplomatic influence despite Western efforts to isolate Moscow. In a November 23, 2014, interview with the Russian Tass News Agency, Putin insisted that Moscow would not allow itself to become internationally isolated behind a new "Iron Curtain." "We understand the fatality of an 'Iron Curtain' for us," Putin told Tass. "We will not go down this path in any case and no one will build a wall around us. That is impossible!"<sup>15</sup> Having Kim sit

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11. Justin McCurry, "North Korea and Russia Forge 'Year of Friendship' Pariah Alliance," *The Guardian*, March 12, 2015.

12. Akanksha Sharma, "Time to Tap Russia and China on North Korea Denuclearization," *East Asia Forum*, August 15, 2015, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2015/08/15/time-to-tap-russia-and-china-on-north-korean-denuclearisation/>.

13. Eric Talmadge, "North Korea's Kim Jong Un Mulls Russia for His World Debut," Yahoo News, January 14, 2015.

14. "Kim Jong Un Moscow Visit Continuation of Russia, North Korea Dialogue," Sputnik, January 28, 2015.

15. "Putin Says Russia is Not Isolated—TASS," Reuters, November 23, 2014.

near Putin during the celebration would have provided the Russian state media with a means to distract Russians from the situation in Ukraine, the international sanctions on Russia, Russians' economic difficulties and diplomatic isolation, as well as the likely absence of other foreign leaders at the event. If South Korean President Park had come, Putin could have tried his hand at high-profile personal diplomacy between the Korean leaders.

But the hoped-for visit, which would have marked the reclusive DPRK leader's first official state visit abroad, failed to materialize.<sup>16</sup> Kim Yong-nam, the symbolic North Korean head of state and president of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, attended instead in a move that fulfilled the letter but not the spirit of the DPRK's pledge to send a senior representative to the event.<sup>17</sup> Possible reasons for his absence include his preoccupation with domestic power struggles in Pyongyang, Kim's disinterest in being just one of many leaders in Moscow for the occasion, a reluctance to embarrass Beijing by having the first meeting between the heads of China and North Korea occur in Russia, and the Russian government's decision to announce a likely visit of Kim despite the DPRK leaders' traditional aversion to revealing their movements in advance and claims by North Koreans that their commitment was simply to send a leader, not the leader, to the event.<sup>18</sup> Although Russian officials and analysts have denied that the misfired visit has set back ties, especially since so many Western leaders including President Park skipped the event, the senior diplomatic exchanges between the two countries appear to have lost some momentum.

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16. Shannon Tiezzi, "North Korea's Kim Jong-un Cancels Trip to Russia," *The Diplomat*, April 30, 2015; Andrew Roth, "Kim Jong-un Won't Attend World War II Celebration in Moscow," *New York Times*, April 30, 2015.

17. Alexei Nikolsky, "North Korea's Titular Head of State to Visit Moscow Instead of Kim Jong Un," Reuters, May 3, 2015.

18. Julian Ryall, "Kim Jong-un Sends Head of State to Russia in His Place," *The Telegraph*, May 4, 2015.

## Moscow's Security Calculus

Russian officials generally agree that the world would be better if North Korea were not to develop a nuclear weapons arsenal, but they differ with Western governments on the best strategy and tactics to avoid such an adverse outcome as well as on the relative severity and urgency of this threat. In particular, they believe that it would take many more years for the DPRK to develop an operational nuclear weapons capacity. Even if it has nuclear weapons, Russians doubt the DPRK would ever use them except for deterrence and self-defense. This assumption makes them question the logic and often the motives of U.S. and ROK policies that focus on this issue and entail a counter-vailing military buildup, to include the missile defenses so strongly opposed by Moscow.

Russian policymakers want to prevent the DPRK's actions from encouraging other countries — such as South Korea, Japan, and perhaps other states — through emulation or for defensive reasons to pursue their own offensive and defensive strategic weapons, especially nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, and ballistic missile defenses, since these capabilities might, under some contingencies, be used against Russian forces. Russian leaders have also sought to constrain North Korea's testing of long-range ballistic missiles because of their proximity to Russian territory and their inaccuracy. Yet, at the end of the day, Russian strategists consider a nuclear-armed DPRK as only an indirect threat, since they do not foresee any reason why North Korea would attack Russia or any other country, and are therefore unwilling to incur major risks or costs to try to force the North Koreans to renounce their nuclear weapons ambitions or to replace the current DPRK regime with a more pliable government.<sup>19</sup>

Russian officials oppose strong sanctions on the DPRK that could precipitate North Korea's collapse into a failed state. They seek to

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19. Artyom Lukin, "Russia Shows Little Concern Over North Korea Nukes (for now)," *East Asia Forum*, March 3, 2013, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/03/03/russia-shows-little-concern-over-north-korean-nukes-for-now/>.

change Pyongyang's behavior, but not its regime. Moscow remains more concerned about the DPRK's collapse than Pyongyang's intransigence regarding its nuclear and missile development programs or the other problems presented by its obnoxious and inscrutable leadership. Disintegration of the North Korean regime could induce widespread economic disruptions in East Asia, generate large refugee flows across Russia's borders, weaken Moscow's influence in the Koreas by ending its unique status as interlocutor with Pyongyang, and potentially remove a buffer zone separating Russia from U.S. 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 Russian territory. Even if the fighting occurred exclusively in North Korea, almost any conceivable armed clash on the Korean Peninsula would worsen Russian security. If a war broke out on the Korean Peninsula and any of the combatants attacked, either intentionally or accidentally, or sabotaged any of the nuclear sites in North and South Korea, it could cause a devastating nuclear accident that could dwarf either Chernobyl or Fukushima, which would potentially affect the Russian Far East as well as Russia's Asian neighbors and markets.<sup>20</sup> If unification occurred through ROK-U.S. military occupation of the North, much of the ROK investment flowing into Russia would be redirected toward North Korea's rehabilitation.

Russians' general aversion to sanctioning North Korea and other states of proliferation concern is longstanding. Russian diplomats typically oppose using sanctions to punish foreign governments. In the case of the DPRK, Russian policymakers argue that a non-coercive, incentive-based strategy offers the best means for persuading Pyongyang to denuclearize. Even more than in the case of Iran, Russian officials worry that using sanctions could antagonize Pyongyang to the point that it lashes back, unpredictably and destructively, in anger. As one of the five permanent UN Security Council members, Russia can veto all decisions by that body, and Moscow has wielded this

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20. "Korean War Unlikely, But Risks for Russia Serious," RIA Novosti, April 9, 2013.

power to block proposed UN resolutions that would have imposed severe international sanctions on the DPRK or authorized the use of force to compel DPRK compliance with UNSC resolutions. Russian officials also oppose the unilateral sanctions adopted by the United States, South Korea, and other countries on North Korea. Among other negative effects, these limit the resources available to Russian-backed regional economic projects. Russian analysts also believe that the sanctions contribute to North Korea's isolation and hardline approach towards other countries, whereas a relaxation of the sanctions would decrease North Korean belligerence. They further argue that the human rights situation in North Korea, which they acknowledge is terrible even though it is not a Russian priority, is impervious to direct foreign pressure to ameliorate.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, Russian officials will sometimes agree to impose limited sanctions on the DPRK as a "lesser evil" than doing nothing, applying much more severe sanctions, or using force. In addition, Moscow has supported some UN punitive measures to ensure that the UNSC remains an important actor in the international community's response to the Korea issue. Russian diplomats fear a repeat of 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 in working through the UN. The experience of Iraq, Kosovo, and Syria shows that, if Moscow blocked all Western-backed measures against the DPRK in the UN, the Western powers could simply pursue collective measures outside the United Nations.

Moscow's influence in the Koreas is constrained by its generally low diplomatic and economic weight in East Asia. Russian officials constantly fear being shunted aside in the Korea peace and security

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21. Georgy Toloraya, "Russia and the Two Koreas: Old Friends, New Partners?" presentation at Korea Economic Institute of America, June 11, 2015, <http://www.keia.org/event/russia-and-two-koreas-old-friends-new-partners>.

dialogue, despite what they see as Moscow's obvious interest in the results. Although the Russian Federation is physically a Pacific country, few East Asians perceive it as a major regional player due to Russia's traditional focus on Europe and the weak political and economic ties between Russia and East Asian countries.<sup>22</sup>

To combat these perceptions, Russian policymakers strive to maintain a high-profile in regional diplomatic efforts and a central role in the six-party talks, a framework that, like the United Nations, substantiates Moscow's claims to great power status in negotiating East Asian security issues. Russian policymakers have also sought to mediate Korean security disputes by playing up their country's good relations with both Koreas. Russian diplomacy has pursued a similar strategy in the Middle East, justifying Russia's ties with Iran, Hamas, and other controversial actors by citing Moscow's value for preserving lines of communication and opportunities for mediation among the parties in conflict. Moscow's most successful intervention to further the talks came when it helped North Korea recover USD 25 million deposited in Macao's Banco Delta Asia.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, Russia has not enjoyed enough influence in either region to broker a settlement.

The Russian government has declared its intent to increase strategic cooperation with the DPRK. For example, in February 2015, Valery Gerasimov, the chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, said that the two militaries would hold joint drills later in 2015, but this has yet to occur.<sup>24</sup> Russia has proposed signing a treaty this year with North Korea on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters and an agreement on preventing dangerous military activities.<sup>25</sup>

Another way that Russia has affirmed its role in Korean security

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22. "South Korea to Develop New Arms in Response to North Korean Nuclear Program," Sputnik, January 20, 2015.

23. "\$20 mln of North Korea's Funds Transferred from Macao Bank-1," RIA Novosti, June 14, 2007.

24. "Russia Plans Joint Military Drills with N. Korea," *Chosun Ilbo*, February 2, 2015.

25. "Russia, North Korea Aim to Sign Defense Deal to Prevent Dangerous Activity," Sputnik, June 23, 2015.

affairs and bolstered its international status is by referring to the DPRK nuclear issue and related security questions in joint statements with other governments. By making such joint declarations, Russia's dialogue partners affirm Moscow's role as a legitimate player on the Korea issue. China is a favorite Russian partner in this enterprise given the overlapping perspective in Moscow and Beijing on many Korean security issues. Until recently, Russian and U.S. leaders have cited their cooperation in managing the North Korean nuclear dispute as evidence that, despite their many bilateral differences, the two governments can continue to work together in solving important international security issues.<sup>26</sup>

Still, 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 North Korea, implying that this failure might have precipitated Pyongyang's uncooperative behavior. In October 2014, for instance, the Russian Foreign Ministry chastised Washington for impeding the resumption of the six-party talks: "If the American side takes adequate steps and makes the effort, not just claims, to North Korea to meet one-sided requirements, we will definitely welcome it," an anonymous official told the Russian media.<sup>27</sup> The exchanges regarding North Korea have not yet helped Russia break out of its diplomatic isolation, except that the Russian and Japanese foreign ministries have launched a formal dialogue on North Korea-related issues.<sup>28</sup>

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26. The United States, Office of the White House Press Secretary, "Joint Statement by President Dmitriy Medvedev of the Russian Federation and President Barack Obama of the United States of America," April 1, 2009, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Joint-Statement-by-President-Dmitriy-Medvedev-of-the-Russian-Federation-and-President-Barack-Obama-of-the-United-States-of-America](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Joint-Statement-by-President-Dmitriy-Medvedev-of-the-Russian-Federation-and-President-Barack-Obama-of-the-United-States-of-America).

27. "Russia Would Welcome US Steps to Resume Nuclear Talks With North Korea: Foreign Ministry," RIA Novosti, October 22, 2014.

28. "Russian and Japanese Foreign Ministries to Discuss the 'North Korean Issue'," Sputnik, January 22, 2015.

## Economic Drivers and Impediments

In addition to their security concerns, Russian officials are eager to reduce tensions on the Korean Peninsula and promote stability in the North to integrate Russia better into the prosperous East Asian region. They hope that closer ties with the Koreans and other Asian countries would facilitate Asian investment and technology transfers to Russia that would help modernize their economy and benefit Russian consumers and exporters.<sup>29</sup> Even before the West imposed economic sanctions on Russia following Moscow's March 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, the Russian government (in what has been called "Putin's Pivot") has been striving to deepen its economic ties with the prosperous Asian region by shipping more energy eastward, joining Asian institutions, and encouraging more Asian investment into Russia.<sup>30</sup> Since the West began imposing sanctions, Russians have redoubled their Asian rebalancing, which Russians hope will build non-Western economic ties and show the West that Moscow can circumvent the sanctions by seeking new partners in Asia (and the Middle East). However, Russia's economic integration in East Asia remains limited and what progress that Moscow has achieved in that region has almost exclusively been with China rather than Japan, South Korea, or North Korea.

This is not Moscow's intent. Some Russians have even ambitiously hoped to use better ties with North Korea as a springboard for increasing Russian relations with other Asian countries.<sup>31</sup> In support of this objective, Russian officials have made critical concessions to resolve the Soviet debt issue that prevented new bilateral and regional investment and transportation projects. The Russian and DPRK governments have also developed plans to reconstruct North Korea's railroad net-

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29. "North Korea Seeks Closer Russia Ties," *Korea Herald*, July 2, 2014.

30. Fiona Hill and Bobo Lo, "Putin's Pivot: Why Russia Is Looking East," *Foreign Affairs*, July 31, 2013, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2013-07-31/putins-pivot>.

31. Gevorg Mirzayan, "Why Russia needs North Korea," *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, July 6, 2015.

work and connect it to that of Russia, build a natural gas pipeline and electricity power lines between their countries through the Korean Peninsula, and develop North Korea's possibly extensive mineral riches. The idea of connecting the Trans-Siberian and Trans-Korean railroads, if realized, would create the longest Euro-Asian land transportation corridor, with a length of more than 10,000 kilometers. Experts believe that the corridor will reduce the time needed for containers to move from East Asia to Europe from six weeks by sea to less than two weeks by rail.<sup>32</sup> In addition, there have been talks of a new road to be constructed between the two countries.<sup>33</sup> A trans-Peninsula road might benefit the North Korean people more than a railway since the truck drivers and other road vehicle operators and passengers would be more likely than railway users to stop inside North Korea and purchase goods and services there.

In its initiatives, Russia has tried to deepen economic ties with both Korean states separately as well as to encourage trilateral economic cooperation between them. The DPRK government has supported this drive since Pyongyang wants to increase its foreign economic engagement, also partly impeded by Western economic sanctions, in general and reduce its dependence on the Chinese economy in particular. The South Korean government has also supported Russia's economic strategy in principle since, provided they do not violate South Korean sanctions, some Russian projects would help achieve President Park Geun-hye's Eurasia Initiative of deepening ties between South Korea and the Eurasian countries in the former Soviet bloc.

Russian-DPRK economic engagement has made some progress. In the first half of 2014, the Russian parliament and president approved the 2012 agreement to write off 90 percent of the DPRK's USD 10.94 billion Soviet-era debt (valued as of September 2012), except for USD 1.09 billion that Pyongyang would pay in semiannual installments over the next twenty years, of which the Russian government has

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32. "Russia Reconstructs 4 Railway Stations in N. Korea," *APN News*, January 28, 2011.

33. Anna Fifield and Michael Birnbaum, "North Korea Might be Courting Russia, but China Still Looms Larger," *The Washington Post*, May 5, 2015.

agreed to contribute to a fund to support bilateral economic infrastructure projects.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, a Russian-DPRK joint venture to upgrade the Rajin port into a transshipment center for Northeast Asia at North Korea's northernmost ice-free port continues to attract interest among South Korean businesses, with the ROK government waiving the application of the economic sanctions adopted following the 2010 provocations.<sup>35</sup> In 2014, a preliminary shipment of Russian coal was sent from the Rajin port to the ROK, to test the feasibility of establishing a more permanent trade route for a consortium of South Korean corporations to utilize.<sup>36</sup>

Russian energy officials and firms are also evaluating various plans to transmit electricity from the Russian Far East to North or South Korea.<sup>37</sup> The governments are still pondering a megaproject in which Russia would spend USD 25 billion over 20 years to modernize North Korea's dilapidated 3,000km rail network in return for privileged access to exploit North Korea's mineral resources, whose value might exceed that cost by several orders of magnitude.<sup>38</sup> Pyongyang has also floated a proposal that would give Russia exploration rights and access to the Onsong copper mine in the North Hamgyong Province in exchange for Russia's paying the electricity costs in Rason, Chongjin, Tanchon, and Wonsan-Mount Kumgang on the North's eastern shores.<sup>39</sup>

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34. Vladimir Soldatkin and Peter Graff, "Russia Writes off 90 Percent of North Korea Debt, Eyes Gas Pipeline," Reuters, April 19, 2014; "Russia, North Korea Conduct First Transactions in Rubles: Ministry," RIA Novosti, October 20, 2014.

35. Alexander Vorontsov, "Is Russia-North Korea Cooperation at a New Stage?" (38 North, May 8, 2014), <http://38north.org/2014/05/avorontsov050814>.

36. "S. Korea to Launch Pilot Shipment Via N. Korea-Russia Route this Week," Yonhap News Agency, November 24, 2014.

37. Leo Byrne, "Wired Up: North Korea Looks to Russia for Electricity," *NK News*, February 2, 2015.

38. "Russia Eyes Railway-for-resources Project with North Korea," AFP, October 30, 2014.

39. "North Korea Offers Russia Copper Ore in Exchange for Electricity," *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, May 6, 2015.

To circumvent the Western sanctions imposed on both their economies, which make it difficult for them to use Western currencies and financial institutions, the Russian and DPRK governments have agreed that they use rubles for some transactions, which could make it easier to realize their declared objective of raising two-way trade to USD 1 billion by 2020.<sup>40</sup> The first ruble-based transaction appeared in some agreements reached during the October 2014 meeting of the Russia-DPRK intergovernmental committee on commercial-economic relations.<sup>41</sup> That same month, the Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East said that it was looking for ways to expand use of the ruble between the two countries as a means to increase the volume of bilateral economic exchanges.<sup>42</sup> In January 2015, the DPRK Foreign Trade Bank began accepting rubles.<sup>43</sup>

North Korea has many minerals and other natural resources, but what Russian entrepreneurs (who can acquire these natural resources in Russia or from other foreign sources) most value about North Korea is its pivotal location connecting Russia and East Asia. They want to make the DPRK into a transit country for Russian energy and economic exports to the ROK and other Asia-Pacific countries. Russian planners aspire to construct energy pipelines between Russia and South Korea across North Korean territory.<sup>44</sup> They have also discussed building a trans-Korean railroad and linking it with Russia's Trans-Siberian rail system. If realized, the new rail line would allow the shipment of goods between Europe and Korea to proceed three times faster than through the Suez Canal.<sup>45</sup> Russians have also sought to

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40. Elena Holodny, "North Korea and Russia Are Undermining America's 'Weaponization of Finance' Plan," *Business Insider*, January 21, 2015.

41. "Russia, North Korea Conduct First Transactions in Rubles: Ministry," RIA Novosti, October 20, 2014.

42. Kang Tae-jun, "North Korea Russia Trade Takes Another Step," *The Diplomat*, January 21, 2015.

43. *Ibid.*

44. "Seoul Proposes Peace, Economic Ties with Russia, N.Korea," RIA Novosti, January 21, 2008; "Putin Reiterates Readiness to Assist Korean Projects-1," RIA Novosti, October 9, 2007.

45. "Russia to Extend Trans-Eurasian Rail Project to Korea," *Russia Today*, June 6, 2006.

use the DPRK's ice-free ports, which unlike Vladivostok, Russia's main Pacific port, are accessible year-round.

But progress towards boosting Russian-DPRK economic ties has remained extremely modest. The Ministry for the Development has managed to build a pontoon bridge at the Khasan border crossing between the two countries, providing a secondary land crossing over the Tumen River.<sup>46</sup> However, other large-scale transportation projects remain works in progress or simply planning concepts without concrete realization. Bilateral trade between the two countries, worth around USD 100-200 million in recent years, accounts for only a miniscule amount of Russia's total trade and a distinct minority of North Korea's international economic activity. According to the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency, China remains North Korea's leading trading partner, with two-way trade amounting to USD 6.86 billion in 2014, equating to a staggering 90.1 percent of all DPRK trade for that year. In 2013, the Minister for Development of the Russian Far East Alexander Galushka and DPRK Minister of Foreign Trade Ri Ryong-nam signed an agreement to increase bilateral trade between Russia and North Korea to USD 1 billion by 2020 through expanded "trade, investment, transport, energy and natural resources, employment and interregional cooperation."<sup>47</sup> Even so, Russia-DPRK trade remains at low levels, with the first three quarters of 2014 seeing a *decline* compared with the first nine months in 2013.<sup>48</sup> While North Korea increased its exports to Moscow, led by a spurt in the textile sector, the value of Russian oil imports fell even more.<sup>49</sup> Second-place Russia is not far ahead of India, Thailand, and even Bangladesh.<sup>50</sup> The volume of

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46. "North Korea and the Russian Far East to be Connected by a Pontoon Bridge," *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, May 6, 2015.

47. Kang Tae-jun, "Russia Signs Economic Development Protocol with North Korea," *NK News*, April 3, 2014.

48. Marcus Noland and Kevin Stahler, "Russia-DPRK Relations Update: Are Fighter Jet Sales in the Cards?" (Peterson Institute of International Economics, January 26, 2015), <http://blogs.piie.com/nk/?p=13794>.

49. Oh Seok-min, "N. Korea's Exports to Russia Jump 32 pct in 2014: Report," Yonhap News Agency, March 18, 2015.

50. Institute for Far Eastern Studies, "North Korea's Trade Volume in 2014: \$7.6

DPRK trade and investment with China will likely remain many times greater than with Russia for years given the greater complementarities of the Chinese and North Korean economies and the deep-rooted and long standing joint PRC-DPRK economic activities and interdependencies. North Korea's continuing frictions with the international community have severely impeded progress in the transnational projects involving North Korean territory. South Korean distrust of the North and other factors also make these projects realization difficult. Rajin has become a transit point for the export of Russian coal to the ROK through the DPRK's territory, but not for shipping any other Russian goods to South Korea or other Asian markets, not even to North Korean clients.<sup>51</sup>

Russia still refuses to provide direct economic assistance to North Korea besides some shipments of humanitarian food aid and typically demands that all transactions conform to free market principles, without state subsidies. Russia has treated its commercial relations with the DPRK exclusively from a market cost-benefit analysis perspective, which considerably constrained economic ties. The one exception has been the thousands of North Korean guest workers who work on logging, construction, and other projects in remote camps in north-eastern Russia, a practice that began during the Soviet period and has continued since then. Although the workers escape the famine conditions that sometimes prevail in the North, their living conditions are hard and the Russian government turns over much of their earnings to the DPRK.<sup>52</sup> A bilateral agreement obliges the Russian authorities to render any North Koreans who flee the camps or who illegally enter the Russian Federation from North Korea over to the DPRK authorities, where they face severe if not fatal punishment.<sup>53</sup>

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billion USD," (North Korean Economy Watch, June 17, 2015), <http://www.nkeconwatch.com/2015/06/17/north-koreas-trade-volume-in-2014-7-6-billion-usd/>.

51. Anna Fifield and Michael Birnbaum, "North Korea Might be Courting Russia, but China Still Looms Larger," *The Washington Post*, May 5, 2015.

52. Alexey Eremenkov, "Russia Moves to Send North Korean Refugees Back Home to Uncertain Fate," *Moscow Times*, November 14, 2014.

Other barriers to DPRK-Russian economic exchanges have included the limited commercial experience and marketable skills of the North Korean workforce, widespread impoverishment that makes purchasing Russian consumer goods impossible for most North Koreans, the use of barter trade, corruption, contractual unreliability, supply interruptions and other shortages, and the DPRK's underdeveloped transportation, energy, and other infrastructure. Given these impediments, trying to reconstruct the DPRK rail network and build new trans-Korean railroads and pipelines could take decades and cost billions of dollars.<sup>54</sup> The success of these projects would also require an unprecedented period of cooperative relations among the two Koreas and Russia. In the past, the poor relations between the two Korean governments have meant that these projects are excessively risky or unprofitable for even state-backed investors.<sup>55</sup> The DPRK authorities have suspended or appropriated joint international projects during a crisis or for economic or political leverage, with the shutdown of the Kaesong Industrial Complex a couple of years ago as a telling example. An emerging challenge is that, if U.S. and other sources of shale gas become widely available on world markets, they could drive down global prices, reducing Asian demand for Russian natural gas imports and therefore Russian profits.<sup>56</sup>

The prospects for near-term Russian-DPRK military-industrial cooperation are also low. In November 2014, the vice chief of the

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53. "Russia and North Korea Sign Agreement to Deport Illegal Immigrants," *The Guardian*, November 11, 2014; Alexey Eremenkou, "Russia Moves to Send North Korean Refugees Back Home to Uncertain Fate," *Moscow Times*, November 14, 2014; and Alexander Podrabinek, "Russia Will Deport Refugees Back to North Korea," (Institute of Modern Russia, November 5, 2014), <http://www.imrussia.org/en/opinions/2077-russia-will-deport-refugees-back-to-north-korea>.

54. Doug Bandow, "Russia and North Korea Play Nice: Vladimir Putin's Ukrainian Dance with Kim Jong-Un," *The World Post*, March 24, 2015.

55. Anna Fifield and Michael Birnbaum, "North Korea Might be Courting Russia, but China Still Looms Larger," *The Washington Post*, May 5, 2015.

56. Troy Stangarone, "Securing Korea's Energy Future," (The Peninsula, Korea Economic Institute of America, October 21, 2013), <http://blog.keia.org/2013/10/securing-koreas-energy-future/>.

DPRK's army general staff, No Kwang-chol, traveled with a North Korean leadership team that visited Moscow. According to the Korean Central News Agency, he met with his Russian counterpart and, "Both sides had a wide-ranging exchange of views on putting the friendship and cooperation between the armies of the two countries on a new higher stage."<sup>57</sup> The DPRK is especially eager to acquire new Russian warplanes to replace its aging Soviet-era planes. The North Koreans reportedly have requested Russia's top-line Su-35, which the DPRK cannot afford and would find challenging to operate and maintain.<sup>58</sup> Moscow has yet to show any interest in such a transaction, or even helping the DPRK sustain and modernize its existing fleet of Soviet-designed warplanes. Although international sanctions limit foreign military sales to the DPRK, Russia might be able to provide spare parts under the guise of aiding North Korea's civilian airliners. North Korea has continued to purchase Russian jet airliners to complement its Soviet legacy air transport fleet for reasons of cost, preexisting infrastructure and Western sanctions. The national airline carrier Air Koryo obtained a Tu-204 airliner in 2008 and 2010.<sup>59</sup>

## Reflections and Implications

Moscow's policies towards Korean issues have remained remarkably consistent during the past two decades. Russian policymakers are eager to normalize the security situation on the Korean Peninsula 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 DPRK actions from prompting additional countries to obtain nuclear weapons or ballistic missiles; keeping Moscow a major security actor in the region; and

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57. "Putin Ready for Summit with Kim," *Korea Herald*, November 21, 2014.

58. Zachary Keck, "North Korea Wants To Buy Russia's Super Advanced Su-35 Fighter Jet," *The National Interest*, January 9, 2015.

59. Associated Press, "EU will Revise Controversial Airline Blacklist," *USA Today*, March 25, 2010.

eventually eliminating the DPRK's nuclear program by peaceful means. Furthermore, Russian policymakers and entrepreneurs have retained visions of building economic projects through the Korean Peninsula that would deepen their country's connections with East Asia, which would benefit the Russian Far East in particular but also serve Moscow's larger goal of integrating Russia more deeply into the prosperous Asia Pacific region.<sup>60</sup> Common Russian strategies to achieve these security goals have included inducing North Korea to suspend its disruptive nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs through economic and security assurances; ending provocative actions by either the North or by the ROK-U.S. alliance; promoting dialogue among all the influential players regarding Korea with Russian participation, minimizing the use of coercion and punishment against Pyongyang by keeping any unavoidable sanctions limited; encouraging all parties to fulfill their previous commitments to prevent the unraveling of earlier agreements; and maintaining a prominent role for Russian diplomacy regarding the Koreas through joint declarations, senior official trips to the region, and keeping the six-party talks and the United Nations Security Council as the main institutions for Korean diplomacy rather than any alternative framework.

The aggregate impact of Russia's new activism in the DPRK is unknowable. If the DPRK's nuclear and missile programs continue unchecked, Pyongyang could amass a larger and more deadly nuclear arsenal in the next few years. This could pose a much more significant threat to the region, embolden Pyongyang to take greater risks, increase the danger that North Korea sells fissile material to another country or to terrorists in exchange for much-needed hard currency, and prompt a vigorous, defensive, and possibly military response by the United States and its allies. What is unclear is how Russia's intervention will affect these dynamics.

Russian policymakers see a virtuous circle at work in their security and economic policies towards North Korea. Russian policymakers

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60. "Russia Reconstructs 4 Railway Stations in N. Korea," *APN News*, January 28, 2011.

argue that Moscow needs a benign regional security environment to achieve its Asian economic goals, including within eastern Russia. According to Gleb Ivashentsov, Russian ambassador to South Korea, regional stability is “crucial to Russia’s economic development,” especially plans to increase exploitation of the natural resources located in Siberia and the Far East. Comparing Russian energy ambitions in eastern Russia to “the development of the American West,” he explained that “Russia needs security guarantees in neighboring countries” for its realization.<sup>61</sup> Conversely, Russian policymakers say that their commercial projects involving the Koreans, if realized, would contribute to regional peace and security, arguing that, “There is no better way than long term economic projects to rebuild trust between North and South Korea.”<sup>62</sup> The logic is that these commercial projects could provide the North with an alternative source of income to trafficking in illegal WMD exports or leveraging threats to expand the DPRK nuclear weapons program to extract humanitarian and financial aid from the international community.<sup>63</sup> Putin joins other Russian officials in arguing that deepening Russian-DPRK “political ties and trade and economic cooperation is definitely in the interests of the peoples of both countries and ensuring regional stability and security.”<sup>64</sup>

It is true that Russia cannot realize its ambitions to build rail links, energy pipelines, and other investments that would link Russia and the ROK through DPRK territory unless intra-Korean tensions subside and the sanctions on North Korea for its nuclear weapons and other illegal activities are relaxed. It is also possible that Russia’s commercial and diplomatic engagement could temper Pyongyang’s problematic external and internal behavior by reassuring its leader-

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61. “Russia Does Not See N. Korea As Nuclear Power: Envoy,” *Yonhap News Agency*, January 22, 2009.

62. Kim Se-jeong, “North Korea’s Military Action Is Intolerable, Russian Amb. Says,” *Korea Times*, January 21, 2009.

63. Andrei Lankov, “North Korea Will Never Give up Its Nuclear Weapons — Lankov,” *NK News*, July 29, 2013.

64. Doug Bandow, “Russia and North Korea Play Nice: Vladimir Putin’s Ukrainian Dance with Kim Jong-un,” *The World Post*, March 24, 2015.

ship while also discouraging the DPRK from testing more nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles for fear of alienating Moscow. However, Russian history and writings suggest Moscow will be tempted by its poor relations with Washington to play the “Pyongyang Pivot” and back North Korean belligerence as a means to gain leverage with or simply punish the United States.<sup>65</sup> Or the greater Russian support could boost North Korea’s military-industrial potential, weaken the DPRK’s diplomatic isolation, embolden more Pyongyang’s provocations, reduce Beijing’s willingness to pressure Pyongyang due to North Korea’s having alternative Russian options, and delay unification by helping prolong the existence of an odious regime that tortures its own people and threatens the rest of the world.

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## **Russia's "Turn to the East" Policy: Role of Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula**

**Georgy Toloraya and Alexander Vorontsov**

Russia's "turn to the East" was not only the reaction to the rift with the West, but a long-term policy started since the turn of the century. Northeast Asia is the gate for Russia to Asia and the Pacific while Korean Peninsula can be the key to Northeast Asia for Russia.

Russia is a stakeholder in the unification issue, which is far from solution because of different concepts of the two parties. Moscow does not support pressure or sanctions, but the multilateral political process.

In 2014-2015, the considerable upsurge in political contacts and economic interaction with North Korea took place. North Korea approves of Russia's strong anti-dominance stance in world affairs and would like to avoid overdependence on China. However, the discussed economic projects are yet to be materialized. Russia sees trilateral and multilateral projects with the participation of both Koreas as the most effective tool for a breakthrough in economic cooperation for prosperity in Korean Peninsula.

**Keywords:** Russia's "turn to the East," Russia-Korea relations, Korean Peninsula nuclear issue, six-party talks, trilateral projects in Korea

### **The "Revenge of Geopolitics" in Northeast Asia and Russia's Stance**

Geopolitical considerations force Russia to pay more and more attention to its Eastern frontier, overcoming the vestiges of the past. Although former USSR tried to project an image of the leader of the "global progressive forces," in fact, its sphere of influence included mostly Eastern Europe. Hostility with China, North Korea's "Juche" policy of maneuver denying Moscow's and Beijing's dictate essentially left only Mongolia and Vietnam in the Soviet sphere of influence in

Asia. Soviet Communist party's attempts to support "national liberation struggle" in several countries of Southeast Asia had controversial results and did not strengthen Moscow's position considerably by the moment of the USSR collapse, although some countries like Laos still have residual respect for Russia. This heritage of "secondary" role of Asia in foreign policy of Russia still lingers. After the breakup of Soviet Union in the 1990s, the new Russian policy was centered on the U.S. and Western Europe, while relations with Asia were neglected (with the exception of China, which at that time was not an economic and political giant of today).

The current rebalancing of Russia's foreign policy with a greater emphasis on relations with China and other non-Western powers is the biggest shift in Russia's global strategy since the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, its origins date back to the 1990s when many experts and politicians spoke about the need to achieve "equality of the two heads of Russian eagle." The "Turn to the East" policy was shaped and started to be implemented as long ago as in 2008-2010. We should note that the initial impulse was given by Russian scholars, specializing in Asia—"Orientalists," who, however, have always been much less numerous and influential than "Westerners" in such renowned think tanks as IMEMO, U.S. and Canada Institute and MGIMO. But even the latter in the mid-1990s started to admit the geopolitical imperatives, noting, "The value of Asia and the Pacific for Russia is growing as the narrowing of the 'window to Atlantic' — this region becomes a new gate to the industrially developed world, opening new markets of weapons, raw materials and industrial goods for Russia."<sup>1</sup>

In 2010, a group of Russian experts headed by Vjačeslav Nikonov suggested the idea of "Russia as Euro-Pacific power"<sup>2</sup> and soon

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1. Kamaludin S. Gadžiev, *Veedenie v političeskiju nauku* [Introduction to political science] (in Russian), (Moscow: Logos Publishing Co., 2000), <http://www.alleng.ru/d/polit/pol017.htm>.
  2. "Russia as a Euro-Pacific Power: New Trends in Asian Regional Architecture and Russia's Role," Proceedings of the International Conference of the Russian National Committee of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-

thereafter Russian President officially supported the concept of concrete measures of Russia's integration into Asia and the Pacific ("Khabarovsk Doctrine").<sup>3</sup> The 2012 APEC summit was meant to be a watershed event in this context — although its impact on Russia's policy was weaker than expected.<sup>4</sup> So the "Asian pivot" was not a spontaneous reaction to the sudden rift with the West in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis.

In 2014, President Putin stressed: "Our active policy in the Asian-Pacific region began not just yesterday and not in response to sanctions, but it is a policy that we have been following for a good many years now. Like many other countries, including Western countries, we saw that Asia is playing an ever-greater role in the world, in the economy and in politics, and there is simply no way we can afford to overlook these developments.

Let me say again that everyone is doing this, and we will do so, too, all the more so as a large part of our country is geographically in Asia. Why should we not make use of our competitive advantages in this area? It would be extremely shortsighted not to do so.

Developing economic ties with these countries and carrying out joint integration projects also create big incentives for our domestic development."<sup>5</sup>

Northeast Asia is pivotal for Russia's deeper involvement into the whole of Asia. This is the area where the "Asian paradox" is obvious — as a contradiction between cooperation in economic growth and lack of security coordination. Russia wants to play a part in solving

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Pacific (CSCAP). Moscow, MGIMO, December 9, 2010 (Moscow: Moscow University Press, 2011), [http://www.spa.msu.ru/uploads/files/books/evro\\_pasif.pdf](http://www.spa.msu.ru/uploads/files/books/evro_pasif.pdf).

3. Russia, Kremlin, "Meeting on Social and Economic Development of the Far East and Cooperation with Pacific Rim Countries" (in Russian), July 2, 2010, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/8234>.
4. "Russian Press Review: APEC Summit — Success for Russia," ITAR-TASS, September 10, 2012.
5. Vladimir Putin, "Speech at the Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," (speech, Sochi, October 24, 2014), Kremlin, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46860>.

this paradox, but so far its role has been inadequate for a big power, more than half of the territory of which is located in Asia and adjacent to Northeast Asia. As the authors of the working paper “Security and Cooperation in Northeast Asia” prepared by influential think tank, Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), in cooperation with Seoul National University note, the region “has accumulated considerable potential for conflict. Political rivalry and struggles over spheres of influence are on the rise. There is obvious tension in the finance sector. Armed forces are being built up. The region is home to six of the ten largest armed forces in the world (China, the United States, North Korea, Russia, Japan, and South Korea) and three of those countries (the U.S., Russia, and China) already possess nuclear weapons while North Korea is developing nuclear weapons.”<sup>6</sup>

However, currently China dominates the Russian policy in Asia, being not only the strategic partner, but also the closest state to modern Russia in almost every aspect — from economic to military, and politics. Relations “have never been better” as officials from both sides keep stressing, however there is a growing concern among the Russian public (especially that of Russian Far East and Siberia). Russia is swiftly becoming a “junior partner” in this tandem, and is overdependent on China, with some people even using the term, “semi-colony.” Of course, this is not the case, but Chinese “monopolization” of Russian foreign policy vis-à-vis Asia is causing concern among certain experts and ruling circles as well. At the same time, relations with Japan are still stagnating, Asian agenda is almost absent from Russia-U.S. relations. Russia is mostly detached and trying to distance itself from the problems of bilateral relation in Northeast Asia, such as U.S.-China growing competition, China-Japan contradictions, and territorial problems in places such as South China Sea.

Russia is trying to raise its profile by suggesting new initiatives for the regional security architecture, aimed, for example, to ASEAN.

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6. Gleb Ivashentsov and Shin Beom-Shik, “Security and Cooperation in Northeast Asia,” The Russian-South Korean Experts Joint Paper (RIAC Working Paper 25, Russian International Affairs Council, 2015), [http://russiancouncil.ru/en/inner/?id\\_4=6536#top-content](http://russiancouncil.ru/en/inner/?id_4=6536#top-content).

The ideas of an inclusive security system date back to Gorbachev with his suggestions of a "Pan-Asiatic collective security system" in 1986-1988. In the 1990s, "ASEAN centrality" in Asian security theory and ASEAN+ mechanism creation gave a new impulse to Russian policy pundits to address this theme. In 2012-2013, Russia suggested its own concept — first in the form of Russian-Chinese Initiative on Security in the Asia-Pacific Region of 2010<sup>7</sup> and later as an idea of conclusion of a comprehensive treaty on security in the Asia-Pacific region. A joint proposal of Russia, China and Brunei to negotiate "Framework Principles of Strengthening Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region" followed in 2014. Russia names the East Asian Summit mechanism as a possible central platform for adopting the decisions and further negotiations. In 2014, Russia proposed an action plan to this end, which lays down a basis for roadmap for reaching concrete agreements and development cooperation in such areas as confidence-building measures, conflict resolution, arms control and non-proliferation, combating terrorism and transnational organized crime, food and energy security, environment, disaster management, and increasing stability of the regional financial system. Incidentally, it has some connotations to South Korean Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI).

However, in the situation of increased conflict between Russia and the West and also Russia's inactivity (non-participation on the summit level in a single East Asian Summit), these suggestions met with a lukewarm response from regional countries. They also contradict the U.S. "hub and spoke" doctrine, anchoring its "Asia pivot" in a rigid alliance system with its allies, such as Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Australia, etc. China's and Russia's approach of a more democratic international relations system in this area is at growing odds with this rigid structural approach which is the cornerstone of U.S. policy in the region.

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7. Georgy Toloraya, "Security Situation in Northeast Asia: A Case Study of the Korean Problem," (Highlights, Valdai Discussion Club, November 27, 2015), <http://valdaiclub.com/opinion/highlights/case-study-of-the-korean-problem/>.

However, the economic reason remains the main motive for Russia's advancement in Asia: gaining economic benefits from the cooperation with the region, which is still considered an "engine of global economy." At the same time, these gains cannot be materialized without addressing the security agenda, especially in Northeast Asia. And the Korean Peninsula has remained the "hot spot" of Asia for decades.

### **The Role of Korean Peninsula for Russia — as Compared to Other Regional Powers**

If Russia does not want its Asian agenda to be fully "kidnapped" by China, its policy should be diversified. The Korean Peninsula, one of the few areas in Asia where Russia is involved into solution of bilateral, regional and global problems (such as nuclear non-proliferation) is the one obvious opportunity. Now that Russia strives to raise its profile in the international arena, the Korea issue is becoming one of the international conflicts where Moscow's involvement must grow. This is especially important as Russia regained its influence in North Korea and all the partners need it to make a political progress here successful. For example, the North Korean issue remains one of the few areas of continuing U.S.-Russian interaction — it was specifically mentioned by Putin as an example of being an area of productive cooperation.<sup>8</sup>

However, so far the attention to the Korean problem has been insufficient. Maybe because they seem intractable and do not immediately promise positive outcomes. That gives the critics the reason to ironically call Russia "the forgotten player" in Korean affairs or, at best, "a bit player," whose role is "often peripheral but can be incredibly unhelpful [to U.S. interests] at the most inopportune moments."<sup>9</sup>

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8. Vladimir Putin, "Speech at the Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club."

9. Victor Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012), pp. 345, 367.

How important is Russia for Korean Peninsula states then? And how could Russia's approaches be compared to those of other actors?

Russia remains an important stakeholder in Korean unification and security issues — generally considered to hold 4th place after the United States, China and Japan (some influential Russian experts argue that Russia holds 3rd place, ahead of Japan, as Japan in fact abstains from using its ability to influence the situation on the Korean Peninsula).<sup>10</sup>

It should be noted, that due to the rising geopolitical contradictions in the Asia-Pacific, the Korean problem is increasingly internationalized. Regardless of the fact that on the surface Korean conflict looks as a showdown between the two competing regimes, in fact since Korean War, the Korean situation — like one, for example, in the Middle East — remains an area of contest for the great powers, pursuing their own, mostly contradictory, goals. Korea may yet again become a flashpoint of a great power competition, given that the most antagonistic couples (China-U.S., Russia-U.S., China-Japan) have their own interests in the region. The situation has even started to resemble somehow the 1950-1980s period: both Koreas have great power supporters growingly at odds with each other. Although Russia is no longer a military-political ally of North Korea, the latter started the 1960-1980s-like game of "balancing" between China and Russia (if not allies, at least non-hostile partners), trying to capitalize on their difficult relations with the United States. Paradoxically, however, the policy logic and actions remain much the same as way back then. That may be explained by the understanding of North and South Korea that both failed to reach the goals set at the onset of the Korean War — therefore both believe that only complete victory over the enemy and its capitulation, not a compromise, can put the conflict to an end.

South Korea in fact sets unification (this is to say, eventual regaining of control over the territories to the North of the DMZ) as a practical

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10. Georgy Toloraya ed., *The Uneasy Neighborhood: Korean Peninsula Problems and Challenges for Russia* (Moscow: MGIMO Public, 2015), p. 4.

goal. That has become especially noticeable during the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administration.”<sup>11</sup> North Koreans thus do have a reason to believe that the “change of regime” concept and eventual disappearance of their statehood still remain the basis for the U.S.-South Korean vision of the fate of DPRK. For a quarter of century, the almost religious belief in the “imminent collapse” of the DPRK as the prerequisite for unification of Korea has remained the mainstream of South Korean and U.S. policy discourse on unification — making it important to “persuade” China and Russia not to support North Korea.

It is true that China, who had supported the DPRK in the Cold War era without any reservations, has changed its position. However, it wants to preserve the status quo and keep the state of North Korea in place, although the Kim Jong-un’s regime, with its internal policies and provocative external behaviors, causes more and more irritation to China. But China cannot afford to lose an important buffer and see the whole of Korea becoming a sphere of U.S. influence. That would be seen as a major setback in geopolitical competition, the magnitude similar to the U.S. losing control over Cuba in the early 1960s and the Cuban missile crisis. An issue of regional importance, such as Korean unification and even a positive prospect of a possible emergence of a friendly unified Korea can only be subordinate to the existential issues of global strategy for Beijing.

Therefore, South Korean enthusiasm about China “changing sides” in the Korean conflict may be ill-founded. An expert notes that “China tried to utilize President Park’s presence [at the military parade in Beijing on September 3, 2015, causing euphoria in South Korea] to show off their closer ties to the U.S., in order to shake up the triangle alliance between the U.S., Japan, and South Korea.”<sup>12</sup> And regardless of South Korean efforts to make good friends with China, Beijing is still suspicious of the double game, as South Korea’s

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11. Kim Subin, “Seoul Secretly Preparing for Unification by Absorption: High Ranking Official,” *NK News*, March 11, 2015.

12. Choi Ha-young, “S. Korean President’s Warm Welcome in China Doesn’t Signify Shift,” *NK News*, September 4, 2015.

alliance with the U.S. is not going to disappear: that would probably remain true for a unified Korea, too. Therefore, China wishes to improve relations with the DPRK — one sign of this was sending “No. 5” in its hierarchy to the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the Korean Workers’ Party (KWP) in Pyongyang in October 2015.

At the same time, the ability of Beijing to influence Pyongyang, even in its own interests, remain, limited — as the paranoically suspicious North Korean leaders might suspect that a change of regime to a more loyal one is not off the table in Beijing altogether. Therefore, China might now be perceived by Pyongyang as an existential threat rather than an ally. Some suggest that its nuclear and missile program developed by North Korea, is meant as a hedge not so much against the United States and South Korea, but China.

Pyongyang’s tactics of getting closer to Russia as a balancer fits well into this picture and further complicates it, creating a web of interests and factors of influence.

The U.S. in fact is not ready for a radical scenario of the DPRK’s fall, either — that would mean getting another international crisis of an unprecedented magnitude on its hands in addition to the complexities in the Middle East. Washington’s vision of solution for the Korean problem is still one-sided, basing on a complicated heritage: from the unhappy memory of the Korean War (this is one of the reasons U.S. is reluctant to use force) and the general allergic reaction to the North Korean regime to the topical nuclear proliferation and strategic military concerns. The bottom line is that the political class of the U.S. is not ready to accept the existence of this totalitarian repressive regime in its current form. No amount of talking and negotiation can probably change such an attitude along the lines of an Iranian scenario, negotiations are not seen as an exit strategy.

Therefore, although the U.S. during Obama’s presidency has abstained from using its abilities (ranging from the option of war to the recognition of the DPRK) and preferred a policy of containment of North Korea (“strategic patience”), this might be based on a false assumption (maybe instigated by South Korea’s assessments) that the forthcoming collapse of North Korea solves all problems. The October

2015 visit of Park Geun-hye to Washington has again put the issue of denuclearization of North Korea and unification in the limelight.<sup>13</sup> However, in practical terms, the existence of the nuclear problem and “dangerous” North Korea allows the U.S. to keep strong political and military grip on South Korea in the U.S. global interests (an example is the inclusion of the ROK into deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) systems, aimed against China and Russia). At the same time, the Korean problem as a thorn in the side of China is also a benefit of containing Beijing’s rising ambitions. Even North Korea’s development of some missile and nuclear potential could be under such logic acceptable for the U.S. policy strategists — as long as North Korea would not cross a “red line” — a game-changer might be Pyongyang’s acquiring a nuclear-armed inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBM), able to reach U.S. territory, which would force U.S. to find a way to hedge the risks.

Russia believes that a collapse scenario is even less likely today than in the 1990s when North Korea suddenly lost much of its external support, plunged into an unprecedented economic crisis, and had not acquired a “nuclear deterrent” yet. Today, the new geopolitical situation — including the above-mentioned stand-off between the U.S. and Russia as well as the rivalry between the U.S. and China — gives little hope for a possibility that the North Korean state can be brought down peacefully in a “soft landing” scenario. The reasons are both the regime and its supporters (at least one million of higher class) are willing to fight because they have no exit strategy and the geopolitical interests of competing coalitions — none can afford the sphere of its influence to be intruded let alone taken by the rival camp.

A crisis in the Korean Peninsula as a way to a Korean unification is unacceptable to Russia. A unified Korea, even with the unlikely event of a U.S. troop withdrawal, would still remain an ally of the United States and one with much more power (for example, territorial claims to China and even Russia cannot be excluded). Therefore, Russia

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13. “S. Korea, U.S. Reaffirm Alliance: Urges N. Korea to Give Up Nuclear Program,” Yonhap News Agency, October 17, 2015.

deems it desirable to preserve both countries' statehood while promoting an evolutionary change in North Korea. But to start this process, Russia believes North Korea should have security guarantees for the existing regime, however bizarre and unpleasant it is. There are simply no better alternatives: it is the best of the bad options. Therefore, Russia's policy goal in Korea is to maintain the existing security structure for stability. That means preventing any sudden changes associated with unification or a serious setback in North Korea's security positions. Any emergencies or a collapse scenario in this nuclear-armed state is highly undesirable.<sup>14</sup>

### **Conflicting Approaches towards the Korean Unification and Security Situation on the Peninsula and around**

The permanently important integral part on the inter-Korean relations is the Koreas' approaches and practical policies aimed at the unification of the motherland. Russia, in full scale, understands the complexity and delicacy of the issue and sincerely welcomes any positive step in such a direction. So, Moscow heartily supported an agreement between Seoul and Pyongyang to arrange another meeting of divided families after a long hiatus.

At the same time, the problem remains the very contradictory one and from time to time leads to the aggravated inter-Korean relations and correspondingly security tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Such kind of recurrent eruption of the interest and mutual polemics took place in recent years.

Therefore, Russia needs to monitor closely any developments of the matter.

As is well known, the governments of North and South Korea continue to repeat like a mantra that they are committed to the idea

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14. In more details see: Georgy Toloraya, "Korean Security and Unification Dilemmas: A Russian Perspective," (Korea Economic Institute of America, June 11, 2015), [http://keia.org/sites/default/files/publications/kei\\_aps\\_georgy\\_toloraya\\_june11.pdf](http://keia.org/sites/default/files/publications/kei_aps_georgy_toloraya_june11.pdf).

of unifying their divided people. But as years go by, the tension between Seoul and Pyongyang continues, and there is no progress toward achieving that objective. According to public opinion polls, most South Koreans under the age of 40 are not interested in the unification of the peninsula. Although there is no public discussion, this critically important sector of the South Korean society is tacitly against any such plans.

Decades have passed since the country was partitioned. The number of families separated by the demilitarized zone (DMZ) has dwindled and emotions have cooled. Many young people in the South increasingly see North Korea more as a foreign country than an integral part of their own state.

Pragmatic calculations now enter the equation: “How much would we South Koreans have to pay for unification? How much would it decrease our standards of living? What if it led to war?”

The once-glowing example of Germany’s unification long ago dimmed in our memory. Experts were aghast after calculating what that merger ended up costing its citizens — it came with a high price tag, even for an economic powerhouse like Germany.

After analyzing the German experience, a program aimed at building bridges with the North emerged in Seoul during the administrations of South Korean presidents Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003) and Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008). The premise was simple enough: we do not need a war with North Korea, we do not need that country’s collapse, and we do not need immediate unification. So what do they need? Reconciliation, gradual rapprochement, and economic cooperation, paving the way for a future union. These were the years of the “Sunshine Policy” and “reconciliation and cooperation.” Two very significant summits between the Korean leaders were held in 2000 and 2007, and bilateral cooperation between the two countries finally blossomed.

But South Korea is a democracy, and after the 2008 elections, conservatives took office who believed the “Sunshine policy” was an idealistic, naïve, and finally mistaken one. However, as we know, the reconciliatory policy supporters continue to remain at the ROK society

in considerable numbers including outstanding intellectuals.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, the conservatives who came to the Blue House in 2008 and continue to control it now have believed the North to be on the verge of collapse. In an attempt to hasten that outcome, they expanded economic sanctions and increased military and political pressure, among other measures. They felt this would surely spell the end for Pyongyang. Naturally, these forced meaningful negotiations, including the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear program, are put onto the back burner.

At some point, those who held sway over the decision-making process in Seoul convinced themselves that they were on the right track and began to try to bring the rest of the world on board.

The international community now joined the efforts to increase the pressure and further isolate the DPRK. North Korea's social and economic strides and its gradual but persistent market reforms were ignored. Instead, attempts were once again made to reintroduce former president Lee Myung-bak's "unification tax," creating new state agencies in the South that would expedite the unification process along the path favored by Seoul.

This was the situation in 2014 when both Seoul and Pyongyang came forward with new unification proposals. The ROK President Park Geun-hye during a Press Conference on New Year's Day reiterated the task of building trust relations with North Korea. Simultaneously, she referred to the unification of the Korean Peninsula as a "bonanza"<sup>16</sup> and lately extended the discussion on unification domestically and internationally by referring to Korean unification as "hitting the jackpot."<sup>17</sup> In this context we should note that many North Koreans as well as some foreign experts were made sick by using such terminology taken from gambling area in regards with such a sensitive and delicate

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15. Moon Chung-in, *The Sunshine Policy: In Defense of Engagement as a Path to Peace in Korea* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2012).

16. Yun Byung-se, "Reunification of the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia Cooperation," *Foreign Relations* 16, no. 1 (2014), p. 18.

17. Chung Tae-ik, "East Asia at a Crossroad and Korea's Choices" *Foreign Relations* 16, no. 1 (2014), p. 8.

subject as national unification.

North Korea also put forth a number of peaceful initiatives at the beginning of the year, but Seoul interpreted them as propaganda or “charm offensive” and ignored them. Moreover, the ROK President Park Geun-hye ordered her Defense Ministry and other law-enforcement agencies to beef up the country’s security, fearing a potential military provocation from North Korea.<sup>18</sup> At a meeting with the president of Switzerland in Bern, she called on the international community to join South Korea in raising pressure on its northern neighbor, in order to increase its isolation and force the country to change its policies.<sup>19</sup>

In March 2014, Park Geun-hye made a keynote address in Dresden offering proposals that were ostensibly attractive for Pyongyang but indirectly promoting the idea of a German-style unification, meaning that the South would take over the North. The president of South Korea claimed, “The Republic of Korea will carry more weight in the world after unification. The northern half of the Korean Peninsula will also see rapid development.”<sup>20</sup> (Allegedly, according to some sources, in the Korean language version of the speech the term “absorption” was clearly stated.)

Observers immediately noted that Dresden, located in the former East Germany, was not an accidental choice of setting for the keynote speech by Park Geun-hye.

Naturally, the proposal was rejected by Pyongyang. In Septem-

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18. “President Park Orders Airtight Security Posture against N. Korea,” *North Korea Newsletter*, no. 297, Yonhap News Agency, January 23, 2014, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2014/01/22/28/0401000000AEN20140122005600325F.html>.

19. “President Park Says North Korea Must Be Forced to Change,” *North Korea Newsletter*, no. 297, Yonhap News Agency, January 23, 2014, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2014/01/22/28/0401000000AEN20140122005600325F.html>.

20. Park Geun-hye, “An Initiative for Peaceful Unification on the Korean Peninsula: Dresden — Beyond Division, Toward Integration” (speech, Dresden, March 28, 2014), Cheong Wa Dae, [http://english1.president.go.kr/activity/speeches.php?srh\[board\\_no\]=24&srh\[page\]=3&srh\[view\\_mode\]=detail&srh\[seq\]=5304&srh\[detail\\_no\]=27](http://english1.president.go.kr/activity/speeches.php?srh[board_no]=24&srh[page]=3&srh[view_mode]=detail&srh[seq]=5304&srh[detail_no]=27).

ber 2014, North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Su-yong personally took to the floor of the United Nations General Assembly in New York after a long absence. He gave a detailed response to South Korea's initiatives and reminded everyone of the principles for unification established by Kim Il-sung, which envisioned a union based on the creation of the "Democratic Confederal Republic of Koryo."

As is well known, the 10-point program for national reunification ("10-Point Program of the Great Unity of the Whole Nation for the Reunification of the Country") was promulgated as a plan to reunite North and South Korea designed by Kim Il-sung in 1993 and further expanded in the North Korean Memorandum of August 11, 1994 on the establishment of the Democratic Confederal Republic of Koryo. Essentially, the plan calls for the creation of a confederal republic with two social systems and two governments, existing within the framework of a single nation and state. During the first phase of the joint government of the two halves of Korea, existing systems would be left intact, because, as the Memorandum emphasizes, "neither party wishes to surrender its social system." This is an evidence of an attempt to seek a common denominator underlying the sense of ethnic solidarity among Koreans, which will make it possible to overcome their ideological differences and political disagreements. It is important to remember that the Korean people "have been living on the same peninsula for over 5,000 years and share the blood of their common ancestors."

This concept, although propagandistic at the time of its suggestion (as the real goal of Kim Il-sung was the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea and unification under his control), in fact involves a gradual, incremental rapprochement between the two Koreas and requires recognition of the two existing, yet conflicting, socioeconomic and political systems on the peninsula. The first phase assumes the creation of national state agencies responsible for the new government's foreign policy and so on, but that would not interfere in the internal political lives of the two constituent entities as they continue to develop autonomously.

This phase of gradual rapprochement would then lead to further

and closer integration.

In connection with the point, it is extremely noteworthy that the plan of the former ROK president Kim Dae-jung (a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and the author behind the concept of the “Sunshine Policy” described in the book *The Korean Problem: Nuclear Crisis, Democracy, and Reunification*), is still quite relevant and agrees with much of what North Korea suggested.<sup>21</sup>

The unification plan that Kim Dae-jung devised over twenty years ago includes three principles (peaceful coexistence, peaceful exchanges, and peaceful unification) and three phases (the confederation of two independent Korean states, the federation of two autonomous regional governments of the North and the South, and unification in accordance with the principle of “one country, one nation, and one government”).

It is notable that the first phase, which was envisioned by the former president of South Korea as being quite lengthy, is very close to the North Korea’s proposal of the Democratic Confederal Republic of Koryo. Of course there are differences, but it is more important to understand that both programs provide a broad basis for bridging the gaps between positions, ironing out details, and reaching compromises. Both approaches largely mirror their authors’ similar view of Korea’s internal problems.

The importance of the philosophical tenets behind the idea of unification should not be exaggerated. The crucial idea is to incrementally integrate the economies of the two states. But, by reaching a mutually acceptable compromise of ideas and merging conceptual approaches, the unification of the Korean nation can be facilitated.

North Korea’s stance on South Korea’s plans for instantaneous unification is clear. Numerous analysts are seriously concerned that deep differences in all realms of life divide the two Korean states, against a backdrop of heightened political and military tensions on the peninsula, and any attempt to bring such plans to fruition (which

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21. Kim Dae-jung, “The German Experience and a Prospect for Korean Unification,” in *The Korean Problem: Nuclear Crisis, Democracy and Reunification. A Collection of Essays, Speeches, and Discussions*, Kim Dae-jung (ed.) (Seoul: The Kim Dae-jung Peace Foundation Press, 1994), pp. 116-117, 121-125.

can only be done through force) would lead to a second Korean War or — in other words — to a complete national disaster.

Nevertheless, this "sacred" topic for North and South Koreans continue to stay in the epicenter of international attention.

There was a time when the northerners had more initiative on this issue, and the southerners were apprehensive about "communization" by the North. Now, in a radical shift of the economic and international power factor in favor of South Korea, according to many experts, North Korea is concerned more about self-preservation and self-survival than about global projects of reunification.

However, in recent years, this problem has sounded very loudly again. This time, Seoul is playing a leading part.

Informed readers remember that one of the stated priorities of South Korea's current government has been the task of creating trust between the North and the South. However, more than three years later, analysts decided that this target has been replaced in practice by the policy of forcing the union through the acceleration of "collapse and regime change" in North Korea. Today, most of the discussion in South Korea, the U.S. think tanks, and in the West as a whole are concentrated on so-called Korea "post-unification" arrangement. Main topics that are discussed now devote to the practical details what and how Seoul should do after the reunification: how to repair the destroyed economy, by which principles (South Korean or international law) should guide the legal aspect of the "reunified" territories and how to carry out justice against the "criminal" leadership, and political and military elites of the current North Korea.

Many researchers think this statement will be, at least, a premature attempt to "cook a hare before catching him." However, this is the reality of the current discourse of the South Korean political elite.

One more confirmation of this phenomenon is the global "Eurasian Initiative," announced by the President of South Korea, Park Geun-hye in November 2013. Obviously, this initiative is a new mega project, which is designed for a much wider area than just East Asia.

However, the analysis of the "Eurasian initiative" through the prism of this article's topic makes it clear that the second main goal of

this concept is the target — “Let’s achieve peace and prosperity of Eurasia by the opening up and nuclear disarmament of North Korea.”

According to the executive vice-chairperson of the South Korean National Unification Advisory Council, “the main purpose of the mega project is the creation of ‘a giant wave’ of peace and prosperity in Eurasian societies, which will arise in Europe, Southwest Asia and the Middle East as a reason for the restructuring, opening up and renunciation of nuclear weapons by North Korea as well as the improvement of human rights in the North. We can use the Eurasian countries as a lever to persuade North Korea. However, if Pyongyang refuses, we will increase the pressure on North Korea — this is where the line of Eurasian prosperity breaks out — to connect the Eurasian line with North Korea by force. Can Pyongyang stop the ‘locomotive’ of Eurasian society which is the fundamental revolution of world history?”<sup>22</sup>

It is not surprising that in Pyongyang, this proposal was met negatively. In September 2015, at the UN General Assembly in New York, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of North Korea Ri Su-yong, gave a detailed response to the “peace” initiative of the South of Korea.

Today, this debate between the officials of the two Koreas continues to gain momentum.

High-ranking South Korean officials constantly voice confidence in the inevitable unification of Korea in the near future, under the terms of South Korea. The-then South Korean Unification Minister Ryoo Chil-jae speaking in Washington, D.C. at the end of 2014, stated: “... for the unification of Korea, we need ‘three wheels’: one of them — improvement of inter-Korean relations; the second-formation of a consensus on reunification within South Korean society (because, as the minister admits, now, for many South Koreans, especially young people, the reunification is not the highest priority).”

But the most important “wheel” is working closely with the

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22. Hyun Kyung-dae, “President Park Geun-hye’s ‘Eurasia Initiative’. One Continent, Creative Continent, Continent of Peace. Opening and Denuclearization of North Korea through the Peaceful Prosperity of Eurasia,” (NUAC News, National Unification Advisory Council, November 1, 2013), <http://www.nuac.go.kr/english/sub04/view01.jsp?numm=36>.

international community, since its participation, and especially that of the United States in the preparation of unification is necessary and even essential. It is thanks to their support that the reunification of Germany became possible. "I am convinced that if the United States firmly supports and assists in the unification of Korea, our dreams of the unification of Korea will become a reality."

North Korean scientists also gave their response. In the February 2015 report by the Institute for Disarmament and Peace of the Foreign Ministry of North Korea, the necessity of an objective evaluation of the realities that exist on the Korean Peninsula is emphasized.<sup>23</sup> And today, they are such that "for 70 years, the two Koreas have been developing along different trajectories determined by opposing ideologies and political systems. At the same time, neither of the Korean sides is willing to give up their own ideology and political system. Therefore, the desire of one party to impose its system on the other is for sure to lead to war and the involvement of neighboring states in it. Given the characteristics of the military capabilities of both the Koreas and their neighbors, the result of attempts to implement such a scenario would be a "catastrophic Armageddon," with which the tragic consequences of the Korean War of the 1950s, the current military conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine would pale by comparison."

On the basis of this analysis, the North Korean author concludes that the coexistence of the two systems is the only realistic way for the unification of Korea. The differences between the systems are not an "Achilles' heel," but rather the reason for the necessity of their coexistence. If the two Korean sides were to unite in one state and begin to respect the unique features of their respective political systems, then the inter-Korean cooperation could develop smoothly and achieving the ultimate goal of unification would cease to be an issue.

At the same time, Pyongyang is convinced that in the course of the integration process, the two Korean sides "should not blindly

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23. Kim Ye Jin, "Well-balanced Approach to the Issues on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia," *NK News*, April 9, 2015.

copy the experience of other countries but form the structure corresponding to the realities and specifics of Korea ... then there will be no need to use other people's brains, or seek permission from external forces or their approval of our decision on how to merge."

Unfortunately but predictably, the South-North polemic continued in course of the 70th Session of the UN General Assembly where the ROK Park Geun-hye delivered her speech on September 28, 2015. The substantial part of the speech naturally was devoted to Seoul's view concerning unification prospects and the ROK President stressed that "unification would be a 'fundamental solution' to such issues as North Korea's nuclear weapons program, its dismal human rights record and provocations."<sup>24</sup>

Of course, North Korea has vehemently reacted to South Korean president proposals and slammed South Korea for infringing upon its sovereignty.<sup>25</sup>

So, as analysts could see, both sides' unification conceptions and practices have their own logics and interesting arguments but they are simultaneously and unfortunately very conflicting goals that create a permanent source of tension.

## **Absence of Substantive Dialogue between South and North Korea — Risk for Neighbors' Security**

The recurring escalations of inter-Korean security tension unfortunately became one of the traditional characteristics of the Korean problem. Another typical characteristic is usually the crisis that takes place at the period of prolong inter-Korean dialogue hiatus.

The most recent confirmation of this reality became the dramatic escalation of military and political tensions on the Korean Peninsula

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24. "N. K. Denounces Park's U.N. Speech, Saying Family Reunions at Stake," *North Korea Newsletter*, no. 382, Yonhap News Agency, October 1, 2015, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2015/09/30/0401000000AEN20150930008700325.html?in=nkletter>.

25. *Ibid.*

in August 2015. The crisis can be viewed from various perspectives, but what stands out is the fact that despite Pyongyang's numerous formal attempts to restart substantial communication with the ROK and Seoul's continual declarations of their desire to build trust between the North and the South, not only economic cooperation, but even meaningful dialogue has grounded to an almost complete halt.

Without attempts to pursue substantive bilateral negotiations, the rhetorical question about whether it is possible to boost trust between the two Koreas has long gone unanswered. The dramatic, but unfortunately quite logical response was the onset of yet another artillery duel across the demilitarized zone (DMZ).

The timeline of the events has been established. On August 4, there was an explosion in the DMZ during a South Korean patrol, seriously injuring two soldiers. In response, Seoul switched on its powerful loudspeaker system that is set up along the demarcation line and which had sat silent for 11 years prior to this episode, resuming its barrage of propaganda against the North. After the northerners made repeated requests that these attempts at sabotage be stopped, Pyongyang blasted the speakers with two volleys of artillery shells. South Korean guns returned fire.

The government of the Republic of Korea announced that the radio broadcasts would continue until the DPRK admitted that it had deliberately set the landmine and issued a formal apology. We, of course, would not like to accept North Korean version of the incident (that it was the Korean War period mine). At the same time, Seoul did not agree to conduct a joint investigation of the incident.

And preparations for large-scale military operations rapidly swung into high gear. Threatening statements from both sides followed, martial law was introduced in North Korea, and troops began to advance toward the zones of their combat deployment. Discussions began in South Korea about bringing in and stationing American strategic B-52 bombers, submarines armed with nuclear missiles, and so forth.

However, once tensions reached a truly alarming level, both sides still had enough sense to agree to hastily convened negotiations,

which had not been held for a very long time. After a 43-hour marathon negotiation in the border village of Panmunjom, an agreement was reached on August 25. A six-point accord was signed. Pyongyang expressed its regret (Seoul accepted it as some kind of “apology”) over the injuries to the South Korean soldiers; Seoul shut off its radio broadcasts; the two parties worked out methods to reduce military tensions and withdraw their troops; and they agreed to continue these high-level talks and to review the possibility of resuming economic ties. The agreement to allow a reunion of families who have been separated by the political division was an important and emotionally meaningful success.

Journalists had plenty to say about this wild drama. They hashed over everything — from the temerity and inexperience of the young leader of North Korea and the obstinacy of the Koreans on both sides of the DMZ, who again decided to play the chicken game, to the Americans’ ambitious plans to encourage military tensions on the Russian and Chinese borders; and from the attempts to disrupt the widespread celebrations in Beijing on September 3 to mark the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII to the desire to contain China’s “peaceful rise,” which includes preventing the Chinese yuan from becoming a reserve currency.

Some of these pronouncements seem silly, while others are perhaps worth a second thought. But none of them throws light on the primary cause behind the dustup. This crisis was unavoidable. It did not break out spontaneously, but during the massive, scheduled Ulchi Freedom Guardian exercises staged by the U.S. and South Korean militaries, in which 50,000 South Korean and 30,000 American troops took part. In addition to these drills, ten other nations that played a role in the Korean War of the 1950s also sent representatives. It is hard to say what preoccupied the North Koreans most — the deployment of a formidable military division on their borders with the clear allusion to Korea’s wartime past, or Washington and Seoul’s repeated mantra that shrilly proclaimed the “routine” and “defensive” nature of the maneuvers.

In any case, Pyongyang could not overlook these exercises. North

Korea interpreted them within the context of the Allies' anti-North Korean policy, which openly states their highest priority — regime change in the DPRK and its incorporation into South Korea. This is why they have stubbornly resisted any meaningful dialogue with Pyongyang in recent years, gambling on its isolation and applying pressure by resorting to such forms of duress as their ambitious campaign against human rights violations in North Korea.

At the same time, it looks like that both Washington and Seoul underestimated how seriously Pyongyang accepted the U.S. President Barack Obama's interview on January 22, 2015 to Internet resource YouTube. That time, the American president happened to speak over the conventional limit, "North Korea is the most isolated, the most sanctioned, the most cut-off on earth. [...] Over time, you will see a regime like this collapse. Our capacity to affect change in North Korea is somewhat limited because you have a million-person army, and they have nuclear technologies and missiles. [...] So the answer is not going to be a military solution. We will keep ratcheting the pressure, but part of what is happening is the environment that we are speaking in today the Internet, over time, is going to be penetrating that country, and it is very hard to sustain that kind of brutal authoritarian regime in this modern world. . . ."26

To our mind, the North Korean leadership interpreted the U.S. first person's frank explanation of Washington's main task regarding the DPRK as regime change as almost a declaration of war. Therefore, the U.S.-ROK military alliance is seen by North with such a position.

It seems promising that common sense prevailed at the last minute in the capitals of the two Korean states and the conflict was reined in, but one is left with the nagging suspicion that not everyone involved in these all-too-frequent events has learned a good lesson. And there's a good chance of a new flare-up of tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

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26. Barack Obama, "Obama's 2015 YouTube Interview," Youtube video, 44:52, posted by "The Daily Conversation," January 22, 2015, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q9NveDmfjBg>.

This accident was accepted by the international public opinion with more concern because it happened on the eve of the 70th anniversary marking the end of the Second World War when many politicians and intellectuals tried to remember and re-examine its lessons in order to not repeat it.

Moreover, not so far ago, the world celebrated another very important historical date — the centennial anniversary of the end of the First World War. That war experience is also an extremely instructive one. A lot of scholars in many countries still are utterly surprised how unexpectedly and swift one pistol shot in Sarajevo firstly led to the small local conflict and then developed into global scale tragedy seemingly against the will of many powers' leaderships. Surely, such a lesson showing how easy a large war can be started and how difficult it is to stop a war is also extremely important not only for Korea but for neighboring states.

### **North Korea's Place in Russia's Regional Policies**

The lesson of the last quarter of century since the breakup of Soviet Union has taught Russia that its influence and ability to defend its interests in Korean settlement is correlated with the degree of its influence on North Korea. As it almost disappeared in the 1990s, Russia was de facto excluded from discussion on the Korean problem. When President Putin gained power in 2000, the approach to North Korea became pragmatic, as he opted for "normal relations" with Pyongyang.<sup>27</sup> His meetings with Kim Jong-il and signing several declarations cemented the ties, although during President Medvedev's years they cooled down, as the diplomatic process stopped and North Korea conducted nuclear and missile tests.<sup>28</sup>

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27. See Alexander Lukin, *Povorot k Azii: Rossijskaia Vnešnajaja Politika na Rubeže Vekov i ee Aktivizacija na Vostočnom Napravlenii* [The Pivot to Asia: Russia's Foreign Policy at the Turn of the Century and Russia's Shift to the East] (in Russian), (Moscow: Ves' mir, 2014), pp. 534-535.

28. Alexander Vorontsov and Georgy Toloraya, "Military Alert on the Korean

After the initial pause in relations due to Kim Jong-un installing his power in Pyongyang, in 2014-2015, the world witnessed a strange phenomenon of upsurge in Russia-DPRK relations, which was immediately dubbed as a "union of outcasts" by Western critics and Russia's liberals. The latter seriously describe current "tightening of the screws" by Putin's government in Russia as "moving towards North Korean model," while Russian communists and leftists treat DPRK almost as a "promised land." It is true, nevertheless, that the confrontation with the West was the factor that brought both countries closer. North Korea stresses, especially in contacts by the military, a "common threat," which resonates in certain Moscow circles, while even pragmatic foreign-policy makers in Russia have to admit that DPRK deserves attention since it has regrettably become one of the few public supporters of Russia on the Ukrainian issue.

But it is not the whole truth and maybe just a fraction of it.

It should be noted that in fact, although it was Russia who consistently tried to improve bilateral relations, in reality it happened mostly by North Korean initiative — thanks to Pyongyang's sudden preparedness to answer Moscow's overtures. Russia in fact started to implement the doctrine of "standing on both legs" on the Korean Peninsula since the early 2000s. Looking at the documents agreed upon at that time,<sup>29</sup> one cannot avoid the conclusion that it is the basic agreements between Putin and Kim Jong-il that bear fruit today (the issues of debt problem solution, trilateral projects, logistics development can all be found in the 2000 and 2001 summit declarations).

Later in the second half of the 2000s, the process stagnated because of the North's nuclear tests and missile development — when Russia reluctantly joined international sanctions. One of the factors since President Medvedev's coming to power was an attempt to "reset" relations with the U.S. It largely failed and the Medvedev-Kim Jong-il summit in 2011 (symbolically the last meeting with a foreign head of

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Peninsula: Time for Some Conclusions," (Carnegie Moscow Center, May 2014), pp. 19-20, [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP\\_Korea\\_web\\_Eng.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_Korea_web_Eng.pdf).

29. "DPRK-Russia Moscow Declaration," North Korea-Russia, August 4, 2001, <http://www.korea-dpr.info/lib/204.pdf>.

state for the late North Korean leader) reinvigorated the relationship with Pyongyang.<sup>30</sup>

Importantly, the issue of the North Korean debt to Russia was agreed upon and the active phase of negotiation followed, resulting in September 2012 in a mutually satisfactory solution to this thorny and longstanding issue, which had long blocked the way to economic deals.<sup>31</sup> Under the deal, Russia wrote off 90 percent of North Korea's USD 11 billion debt while 10 percent was to be put on a special account to finance Russian investment in DPRK "in humanitarian areas."<sup>32</sup> However, over the time which elapsed after the agreement entered into force, no such investment was recorded, giving rise to a suspicion that it was just a face-saving gesture for Russia, while North Koreans had no intention to pay anything at all.

Kim Jong-il's death and the process of power transition in Pyongyang to Kim Jong-un, the prospects of which were not certain at first, delayed the practical broadening of cooperation. However, when Russian experts concluded that the Kim Jong-un regime was stable enough to deal with negotiations on several major economic projects and political consultations between the DPRK and Russia started — answering the North Korea's initiative.

The divisive international situation and Russia's new assessment of the strategic goals of major power created a climate conducive to that. Also, Russia got rid of ideological clichés of Western origin, which put the brake on the relations in the 1990s and 2000s — for example, those concerning the nuclear problem of Korean Peninsula.

It is hard to find a direct criticism of North Korean missile and nuclear programs as well as straight-forward demands for DPRK denuclearization in the recent official Russian statements, although Russia stresses it does not recognize the nuclear status of DPRK.<sup>33</sup>

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30. "Kim Jong-il in Talks with Russia's Dmitry Medvedev," *BBC*, August 24, 2011.

31. Miriam Elder, "Russia Writes Off \$10bn of North Korean Debt," *The Guardian*, September 18, 2012.

32. Georgy Toloraya, "It is Time for Russia to Invite Kim Jong Un to Vladivostok," *The Russian Gazeta*, July 8, 2012.

Moscow, however, seems to recognize, if not saying in public, that the goal of DPRK denuclearization is hardly attainable at the moment. Therefore, a multilateral diplomatic process should be a tool to hedge the risks, stop North Korea from improving its arsenal, maybe to include a hydrogen bomb and prevent nuclear proliferation. At the same time, the logic goes, the non-proliferation issue cannot be suitably solved without addressing broader security issues. This is a nuance differing from Russian position before 2012, while China keeps insisting on the validity of denuclearization, as stressed at the international seminar in Beijing at the occasion of the September 19 Joint Statement jubilee in 2005.<sup>34</sup>

The most obvious and widely discussed reason for North Korea to reach out to Russia was to move away from overdependence on China. As the Chinese leader Xi Jinping went to Seoul before Pyongyang (which he so far has not visited) and then invited South Korean President Park Geun-hye to the military parade in September 2015, South Koreans began to brag that China "chose the South" instead of the North. Pyongyang became openly defiant towards Beijing, criticizing "certain country" [implying China], and turned to Russia — much as a challenge to Beijing. The DPRK's "Russian tilt," aiming for support from Russia (also in exchange for its support of Russia on the Ukrainian issue), is in fact targeted at irritating China and making Beijing jealous.<sup>35</sup> However, such tactics might be temporary and Pyongyang will get closer to China pretty soon again. The high-level DPRK-Chinese meeting in October 2015 in Pyongyang on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the KWP may signal such a change.

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33. "Foreign Ministry: The Recognition of North Korea as a Nuclear Weapons State is Unacceptable for Russia" (in Russian), *Pronedra*, October 4, 2015.

34. China, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Regular Press Conference," September 15, 2015, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/t1296803.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1296803.shtml).

35. Georgy Toloraya, "China can't Solve Seoul's N. Korea Problem," *NK News*, September 21, 2015.

## **Current Prospects of Political and Economic Relations between Russia and DPRK**

In comparison with the preceding period, political exchanges sharply increased in 2014-2015. Many high-profile political visits to Russia took place within two years, which were unprecedented for the last two decades. Russian Vice-Premier Yuri Trutnev and Minister of Far East Development Alexander Galushka, who visited Pyongyang several times, are especially active — which gives the Russia's DPRK policy a long-absent personal touch and became a lobbying factor. In economics, the 7th session of the Intergovernmental Commission in April 2014 in Pyongyang became a watershed event. 2015 was declared a "Year of Friendship." More than a dozen treaties and agreements were signed, paving the way to numerous large- and medium-scale bilateral projects. However, Russia's reaction to DPRK's request for the renewal of military cooperation remains lukewarm, although the international situations (including Russia's military involvement in Syria — traditional military partner of North Korea) — seem conducive to that.

The failure of Kim Jong-un to visit Russia for the Victory day celebration in May 2015 did steal the envisaged boost in bilateral political relations, but in economic sphere it meant little. Negotiations on different economic projects for government and business are now of a scale unprecedented for the last three decades (seemingly reaching the level of the period after the Kim Il-sung's remarkable visit to the USSR in 1984 before the economic cooperation collapsed in the wake of USSR break-up). The short period between 2000-2002 saw some revival of commerce as a result of the political rapprochement but the liberal-minded Russian economic establishment came close to sabotaging politically motivated arrangements, being reluctant to deal with the "doomed regime" and waste money on aid to it — the telling example is the debt repayment talks — they started immediately after meetings between Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-il in 2000-2001, but dragged on for a decade.

The creation of infrastructure for economic cooperation is now

underway. Both countries have agreed to appoint "project commissioners" who will work to reduce red tape and streamline business interactions, acting as "unique points of contact" for strategic projects. For the first time, a Russia-North Korea business council has been created. Unlike in the past, sectorial meetings have become regular and there are now several dozen tracks of government-to-government and business-to-government as well as business-to-business negotiations. In October 2015, it was agreed to set a Russia-North Korea trading house — which would handle directly the Russian-North Korean trade deals via e-commerce means, avoiding intermediaries — such as the Chinese who are currently estimated to handle about USD 900 million of trade involving Russian exports to North Korea.<sup>36</sup>

However, the reached agreements now need to be implemented. The basis for it is questionable. Responsible Russian businessmen tend to avoid the uncertainties and limitations on financial transactions involved in dealing with heavily sanctioned North Korea. Despite the *de facto* advance of a market economy of sorts in North Korea, Russian businessmen are experiencing the same old hurdles, familiar for decades of cooperation under the Soviet Union: North Koreans seem to pursue short-term individual gains; unilaterally modify agreements; one-sidedly introduce new rules (sometimes retroactively) unfavorable to investors; break obligations; and deliver goods late. Decision-making mechanisms in North Korea are still opaque, decisions are often based on the spontaneous impulses of higher authorities that cannot be contacted, and there is general lack of coordination between different branches of the state system and economic organizations. Problems with communication persist. In October 2014, the two countries agreed on settling the accounts in Russian rubles without the involvement of U.S. banks or U.S. dollars and such transactions started in 2015, but so far the scale is limited.

However, it is true that a new concept of bilateral cooperation seems to be emerging from the Russian leadership's increased atten-

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36. Chad O'Carroll, "Russia and North Korea Agree in Principle to Build Joint Trade House," *NK News*, October 14, 2015.

tion to the DPRK. Still, Russia's overall approach is very pragmatic: anything the North Koreans want, they should certainly pay for them, and in advance. North Korea's most valuable resources are minerals and raw materials, and most deals use these reserves as a guarantee for reciprocity (like coal in exchange for pig iron, etc.). The most well-known project is called "Victory": it provides for reconstruction of 3,500km of railroads in the span of 20 years (started in October 2014 with the Pyongyang-Nampo route) in exchange for the extraction of North Korean minerals (and exporting them). However, the bankruptcy of the Russian partner ("Mostovik") stalled the project and so far no other company has undertaken to continue the project. North Korea also suggested allowing Russian companies to develop copper assets in North Hamgyong province.<sup>37</sup> It is agreed that Russian geologists would conduct a survey of mineral resources in the DPRK, based on the materials which were accumulated during decades of Russia-DPRK cooperation.

Both sides agreed on cooperation in the special economic zones of the two countries (they are called Territories of priority development in the Far East) and consider a trilateral zone with participation from the two Koreas.<sup>38</sup> The DPRK is interested in Russian investment in the Wonsan-Mt. Kumgang tourist zone. Also, the pontoon bridge at Tumen River is to be constructed, easing exchanges between the two countries.<sup>39</sup>

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37. Christopher Rivituso, "N. Korean Delegation Visits Russian Gold Mine," *NK News*, September 15, 2015.

38. "Russia and Democratic People's Republic of Korea Intend to Develop Cooperation in the Sphere of Energy Power" (in Russian), *Regnum*, September 3, 2015.

39. "The Russian Federation and Democratic People's Republic of Korea Discussed Development of Business Connections at World Economic Forum" (in Russian), (TPP-Inform, September 4, 2015), <http://www.tpp-inform.ru/news/22371.html>.

## North and South Korea and Russia — Problems of Interaction in a Geopolitical Game

Moscow sees the potential three-party projects attracting South Korean investment into North Korea via Russia as a game-changer. Such a concept was proposed by Russian policy makers in the 1990s. They can bring much-needed financing, provide markets for Russia and North Korea in the South, and vice versa. Such projects are also important geopolitically and geoeconomically for promoting regional peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia. They are seen both as a source of mutual prosperity and as a tool to help the North Korean economy modernize, as well as a way to build mutual trust and improve the political atmosphere.

Despite the common perception, North Korea has always been in favor of such projects and it is well documented in Russia-DPRK bilateral dealings. Especially now, when a new course for establishing free economic zones has been declared by the North with great fanfare. The TKR-TSR project is now a priority for the state-owned "Russian railroad company." It is worth noting that Russia and North Korea see Rajin-Khasan rail-link project as a pilot one for a future Trans-Korean railroad connecting to the Trans-Siberian line (as stated in the Moscow Summit Declaration of 2001). Russia has invested the equivalent of USD 340 million into the project. In September 2013, the railroad was officially opened and the coal started to be transported (although initially the plan was or bringing containers from South Korea to Europe). Since 2014, in accordance with the agreement on the summit level in November 2013, Korean companies such as POSCO, Hyundai Merchant Marine Co. and Korail started feasibility studies, and three shipments of coal were delivered to South Korea (Pohang). There is a possibility South Korea will join the project in 2016.

Other trilateral projects not in the limelight are also important. The power line connecting the Russian Far East, where excessive electricity generation capacity for export exists with South Korea as an export market has been discussed for many years. However, Russia remains committed to the project and has been discussing it recently

on a bilateral basis.

Of most significance is the fate of the gas pipeline project, which was agreed to at the summit level between Russia and North Korea in 2011. This was to become a real game-changer since the pipeline enhances the energy security of South Korea and brings North Korea benefits without any concessions or dangers associated with “opening.” The project has been pursued since 2003. (The project needs an investment of USD 2.5 billion for supply of a volume of 12 billion cubic meters per year). The gas pipeline in Korea, because of external (the need to get a connection to the Asian gas market) and internal factors (the need to diversify production and exports as well as to use Gazprom’s existing capacity to build pipelines), was one of the most important Russian economic undertakings in Asia and the Pacific.

However, the project became a political hostage, involving not only South and North Korea, but also the U.S. and China. A political decision by the South Korean government (Russia and the DPRK have already explicitly confirmed their readiness to implement this project) to approve the project was never made. Therefore, Gazprom is now building an LNG plant in the Far East, and has been losing interest in the overland pipeline. It is considering supplying the more expensive LNG to South Korea by sea rather than continue to engage in this tug-of-war over the pipeline although Russian experts consider there is a demand for piped gas in the ROK.<sup>40</sup>

Given the appropriate political atmosphere, other trilateral and multilateral projects could be initiated. However, the crucial issue is the easing of tensions between the two countries. Russia would do it best to promote reconciliation and dialogue between the two Koreas as it fully corresponds with its political and economic interests.

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## **Russia, China and the Korean Peninsula: A Post-Ukraine Assessment**

**Artyom Lukin**

The paper deals with Russia's policies toward the Korean Peninsula in the post-Ukraine strategic environment. The article begins with the analysis of how Russia is drawing closer to China due to its ongoing confrontation with the West and the Ukraine crisis. The article then reviews three distinctive periods in Russian post-Cold War strategy toward the Koreas: the 1990s; the 2000s and the early 2010s; and 2014 onward. The author argues that Russia's current policies toward the Peninsula are being increasingly driven by anti-Americanism and the rising dependence on China. Russia's ties with the North are experiencing a renaissance, while the relations with the South have soured. Russia's growing deference to China's interests in East Asia will result in Moscow closely aligning with Beijing on the Korean Peninsula issues. In case of a North Korean contingency, this may lead to a Sino-Russian coordinated intervention in the North.

**Keywords:** Korean Peninsula, Russia, China, the Ukraine crisis, Northeast Asian security

### **Introduction**

The paper deals with Russia's policies toward the Korean Peninsula in the post-Ukraine strategic environment. The article begins with the analysis of how Russia is drawing closer to China due to its ongoing confrontation with the West and the Ukraine crisis. The article then reviews three distinctive periods in Russian post-Cold War strategy toward the Koreas: the 1990s; the 2000s and the early 2010s; and 2014 onward. The author argues that Russia's current policies toward the Peninsula are being increasingly driven by anti-Americanism and the rising dependence on China. Russia's ties with the North are experi-

encing a renaissance, while relations with the South, a U.S. ally, have soured. Russia's growing deference to China's interests in East Asia is likely to result in Moscow closely aligning with China on the Peninsula issues and playing second fiddle to Beijing. In case of a North Korean contingency, this may lead to a Sino-Russian coordinated intervention in the North, a scenario under which Seoul's chances to achieve unification on its own terms are reduced to near zero.

### **Sino-Russian Relationship: From a Strategic Partnership to a Quasi-alliance**

The Russian-Chinese strategic partnership has been assessed in a variety of ways since its inception in the second half of the 1990s. Until recently, the dominant view in the West was that it is "an inherently limited partnership," or "an axis of convenience," which is unbalanced and shaky due to cultural barriers and the two countries' significantly divergent interests that are likely to diverge even more in the future.<sup>1</sup> Any idea of upgrading the partnership to the level of alliance has been rejected as unrealistic.<sup>2</sup>

From the beginning, however, there was also a dissenting view that saw Russian-Chinese collaboration as something much more durable and having a great potential for further development. In 2001, Ariel Cohen characterized it as an "emerging alliance" that would require careful monitoring, predicting that "the degree to which the Sino-Russian alliance may become anti-Western in future depends on how deeply the two Eurasian powers feel that the United States threatens their interests."<sup>3</sup> In an article published in 2008,

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1. Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing, and the New Geopolitics* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2008). See also Stephen Kotkin, "The Unbalanced Triangle," *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 5 (September-October 2009), pp. 130-138.
  2. See, for example, Natasha Kuhrt, "Russia and China: Strategic Partnership or Asymmetrical Dependence?" in *Russia and East Asia: Informal and Gradual Integration*, Tsuneo Akaha and Anna Vassilieva, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 91-107.

Thomas Wilkins concludes that the Moscow-Beijing partnership is “a highly efficacious vehicle for coordinating Russo-Chinese-SCO security policy. Those who doubt its capacities and durability may be in for a shock as it increasingly exercises dominance in Central Asia and begins to wield powerful influence on the global stage.”<sup>4</sup>

The latter view, emphasizing the potency of Russian-Chinese collaboration, appears to be supported by developments since 2012, and especially in the wake of the Ukraine crisis, which amounts to a steady increase in the depth and scope of the bilateral relationship. It may not yet be accurate to describe the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership as an alliance, but the relationship is certainly growing stronger. Indeed, the Russian-Chinese partnership, as it stands today, looks more solid and efficient than some of Washington’s “treaty alliances” such as the one with Thailand.

The Ukraine crisis, which started to develop in the fall of 2013, consolidated the Moscow-Beijing axis. Beijing refused to join the Washington-led campaign to ostracize Moscow and displayed benevolent neutrality regarding Russian moves in Crimea and Ukraine. Vladimir Putin’s visits to Shanghai (May 2014) and Beijing (November 2014, September 2015), Xi Jinping’s trip to Moscow (May 2015), and many other high-level Russia-China meetings since the beginning of the Ukraine trouble, underscored the growing closeness between the two great powers. In October 2014, during a meeting with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, Putin declared that Russia and China were “natural partners and natural allies,” using the word “ally” for the first time with respect to Beijing.<sup>5</sup>

Russia and China concluded a host of agreements, substantially

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3. Ariel Cohen, “The Russia-China Friendship and Cooperation Treaty: A Strategic Shift in Eurasia?” (The Heritage Foundation, July 18, 2001), <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2001/07/the-russia-china-friendship-and-cooperation-treaty>.
  4. Thomas Wilkins, “Russo-Chinese Strategic Partnership: A New Form of Security Cooperation?” *Contemporary Security Policy* 29, no. 2 (2008), p. 378.
  5. “Putin Confirms Plans to Meet Chinese President During APEC Summit in Beijing,” RIA Novosti, October 14, 2014.

expanding and deepening bilateral cooperation in energy, finance, and high-tech and other sectors. The biggest among them was a 30-year contract of USD 400 billion to supply natural gas from Eastern Siberia to northeastern China signed in May 2014. This was followed, in November 2014 and September 2015, by framework agreements that would allow China to receive pipeline gas from Western Siberia and Sakhalin Island. At the same time, China's imports of Russian oil skyrocketed by nearly 40 percent in 2014, displacing other suppliers' share of the Chinese import market, such as Saudi Arabia.<sup>6</sup>

The central banks of the two countries signed a currency swap agreement worth 150 billion yuan (around USD 25 billion), enabling Russia to draw on yuan in case of need, and Beijing officials announced China was willing to help the Russian economy.<sup>7</sup> As leading Western agencies downgraded Russia's ratings to junk or near-junk level, the Chinese credit rating agency Dagong Global gave Russia's Gazprom the highest AAA rating, which would enable the Russian energy giant to place shares in Hong Kong.<sup>8</sup> While Western financial institutions drastically cut their lending to Russian businesses, Chinese banks were expanding their presence in Russia, with many of the loans denominated in yuan.<sup>9</sup> Another sign of growing collaboration in finance was the growing share of Russia-China trade conducted in

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6. Russia, Kremlin, "Press Statements Following Russian-Chinese Talks," May 8, 2015, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/49433>; "Russia, OPEC Jostle to Meet China Oil Demand," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 23, 2015.
  7. "Russia May Seek China Help to Deal with Crisis," *The South China Morning Post*, December 18, 2014. See also, "Beijing Ready to Help Russia's Rattled Economy, Chinese Foreign Minister Says," *The South China Morning Post*, December 22, 2014.
  8. Jerin Mathew, "China's Dagong Undermines Western Sanctions on Russia, Rates Gazprom's Debt at Top AAA," *International Business Times*, February 2, 2015.
  9. "To Mutual Benefit of the Parties" (in Russian), *Kommersant*, June 4, 2015; Alexander Gabuev, "Smiles and Waves: What Xi Jinping Took Away from Moscow," (Carnegie Moscow Center, May 29, 2015), <http://carnegie.ru/eurasiaoutlook/?fa=60248>.

their national currencies (mostly yuan), rather than the U.S. dollars. By May 2015, this share grew to seven percent, compared to almost zero only a few years before.<sup>10</sup>

Russia has traditionally been wary of any Chinese presence in its Far East, which shares a 4,000-kilometer border with China. However, over 2014 and 2015, Moscow lifted tacit restrictions on Chinese investments and began to actively court Chinese capital. In a landmark move, the Russian government agreed to sell stakes in the country's most lucrative oil field and the world's third biggest copper field, both located in Eastern Siberia to Chinese companies.<sup>11</sup> Russia and China began construction of a railway bridge, the first ever permanent link between the two countries across the Amur River that will connect the Russian Far East's hinterland to China's Heilongjiang province. Russian and Chinese companies also agreed to jointly develop the port of Zarubino, strategically located at the junction of the Russian, Chinese, and North Korean borders. The port will provide China's landlocked provinces of Jilin and Heilongjiang with direct access to the East Sea.

There are areas where Russia and China have competing interests, particularly Central Asia, where China's growing economic presence has long worried Russia. However, since 2014, Moscow has become more accommodating toward China there. In May 2015, Putin and Xi agreed to coordinate their flagship economic initiatives in Central Asia, the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and China's Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB). In their joint declaration, the parties expressed willingness "to make coordinated efforts toward the integration of constructing EEU and SREB," with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) serving as the main platform for linking up the two initiatives. The document also mentions "a long-term goal of progressing toward a free trade zone between EEU and

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10. Russia, Kremlin, "Press Statements Following Russian-Chinese Talks."

11. Alexei Lossan, "Rosneft to Sell 10 Percent Stake in Largest Oil Field to Chinese Company," *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, September 8, 2014; "Russia, China to Jointly Develop Udokan Copper Field in Transbaikalia," ITAR-TASS, May 20, 2014.

China.”<sup>12</sup>

On the political-military front, Russia and China have been increasing the frequency and scale of their joint drills. In May 2015, in a move fraught with symbolism, they conducted their first naval exercise in the Mediterranean, NATO’s maritime backyard. Perhaps even more importantly, Russia, in a departure from its previous policies, appears ready to sell China its most advanced weapons platforms, such as S-400 surface-to-air missile systems and Su-35 fighter jets.<sup>13</sup>

As Gilbert Rozman points out, Beijing finds itself in a more competitive relationship with Washington and its allies, making Russia “an irreplaceable partner” in balancing against the United States.<sup>14</sup> In recent years, calls have risen in China to upgrade the partnership with Russia to a full-scale alliance.<sup>15</sup> Some news outlets have posited that Beijing and Moscow are already “allies” without an alliance treaty,<sup>16</sup> while a growing number of Chinese experts characterize the relationship as a “quasi-alliance.”<sup>17</sup> China’s first blue book on national

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12. Russia, Kremlin, “Joint Declaration by the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China on the Coordination of the Construction of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Silk Road Economic Belt,” May 8, 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/4971>.
  13. Catherine Putz, “Sold: Russian S-400 Missile Defense Systems to China,” *The Diplomat*, April 14, 2015; Nikolai Novichkov and James Hardy, “Russia Ready to Supply ‘Standard’ Su-35s to China, says Official,” *HIS Jane’s 360*, November 25, 2014.
  14. Gilbert Rozman, “Chinese Views of Sino-Russian Relations and the U.S. Pivot,” *Uneasy Triangle: China, Russia and the United States in the New Global Order* (Washington, D.C.: The Center on Global Interests, October 2015), p. 20.
  15. For Chinese views arguing in favor of the alliance with Russia, see, for example, Yan Xuetong, “The Weakening of the Unipolar Configuration,” in *China 3.0*, Mark Leonard (ed.) (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, November 2012), [http://ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR66\\_CHINA\\_30\\_final.pdf](http://ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR66_CHINA_30_final.pdf), pp. 112-119. See also “U.S. Actions Make China-Russia Alliance Appealing,” *Global Times*, January 20, 2012; Dai Xu, “China and Russia should Forge a Eurasian Alliance” (in Russian), *People’s Daily* (Russian-language edition), January 30, 2012.
  16. Mu Chunshan, “Why Doesn’t Russia Support China in the South China Sea?” *The Diplomat*, June 21, 2014.
  17. See, for example, Zhang Wenzong, Xue Wei, Li Xuegang, and Zhang Shenshen, “Analysis of the Strategic Influence of the Ukraine Crisis,” *Contemporary International Relations* 25, no. 1 (January/February 2015), pp. 75-91.

security, commissioned by the government and written by scholars of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, states that China should consider forming an “alliance with Russia.”<sup>18</sup>

As Dmitri Trenin notes, the Russia-China bond “is solid, for it is based on fundamental national interests regarding the world order as both the Russian and Chinese governments would prefer to see it.”<sup>19</sup> Moscow is not inimical to China’s rise as a great power since this creates economic and political alternatives for Russia other than the West. The consensus in the Russian ruling elite is that, in the foreseeable future, China will not pose a threat to Russia and can be a reliable partner. General (retired) Leonid Reshetnikov, who heads the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (Kremlin’s foreign policy think-tank) describes the situation as follows:

We are closely following the situation in China. Of course, this is a big country, where different factions exist, including expansionist ones. But we are confident that China is interested in good relations with Russia. China’s main rival is the United States, not Russia. Therefore, China needs a well-protected and quiet rear area. For the next 30-40 years, Russia is unlikely to face any threat from China. Beijing is doing its best to avoid whatever might cause Russia’s irritation and negative reaction. A serious conflict between Russia and China is possible only if grave mistakes are made by us or by the Chinese, or else if the American agents do a good job in China. The Western countries are keen to set Russia and China against each other. They keep forcing on us this China threat notion. Yet we will never buy that.<sup>20</sup>

Viewing themselves as great powers, both Moscow and Beijing loathe the idea of a systemic hegemon that dictates and adjudicates global rules, particularly considering that Russia remembers itself as having

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18. “Terrorism Surging in China: Blue Paper,” *Beijing News*, May 7, 2014.

19. Dmitri Trenin, “Russia and the Rise of Asia” (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, November 2013), p. 6, [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP\\_Trenin\\_Engl\\_Asia2013.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_Trenin_Engl_Asia2013.pdf).

20. Remarks by Leonid Reshetnikov, Director, Russian Institute of Strategic Studies, Roundtable at Far Eastern Federal University, Vladivostok, February 2014 (author’s personal notes).

been a superpower while China preserves memories of Middle Kingdom glory. From the balance-of-power perspective, it is only natural that two lesser poles should join forces against the preponderant player. At the regional level of geopolitics, U.S. hegemony prevents Russia and China from enjoying a comfortable margin of security, if not dominance, in what they regard as their rightful domains. For Russia, this is the post-Soviet space; for China, East Asia. Moscow and Beijing see Washington's policies, such as its support for a pro-Western Ukraine and the "rebalancing" in the Pacific, as aimed at direct containment of, respectively, Russia and China.

In order to counterbalance the United States on the global stage, Russia and China coordinate their steps in the world governing bodies, particularly the United Nations Security Council, and promote new institutions, such as the BRICS and its New Development Bank, designed to serve as alternatives to the Western-dominated international order. In their common regional neighborhood, Moscow and Beijing aim for what may be dubbed "Eurasian continentalism." What they envision would be based on the newly expanded Shanghai Cooperation Organization and, possibly, on the recently reinvigorated Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA). These are organizations in which Beijing and Moscow play prominent parts and the United States is conspicuously absent. China and Russia seek to act as the principal co-leaders and shapers of the new economic and security architecture of continental Eurasia, perhaps with inputs from Delhi, Islamabad, and Tehran, while collaborating to exclude the United States. Finally, Moscow and Beijing seem ready to provide tacit diplomatic support to each other in the event of conflicts with their neighbors in Eastern Europe and East Asia, respectively. That means, for example, that China takes a position of benevolent neutrality regarding Russia's actions on Ukraine, while Moscow looks the other way when Beijing pushes its claims in the South China Sea.<sup>21</sup>

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21. For example, Russia's head representative at the *Shangri La Dialogue* on Asian security, Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov, did not even mention

Moscow and Beijing also share an interest in guarding their state-centric autocratic political systems against what they perceive as Western subversion. As the Director of the Russian Studies Institute at China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations Feng Yujun emphasizes, Russia and China grow “increasingly close in their concepts of political governance” and the two countries “have a greater stake in mutual support to counter political pressure from the West.”<sup>22</sup>

This convergence of basic interests constitutes the foundation for a strategic partnership. The existence of a common foe — the United States — may be transforming the partnership into an entente or perhaps an alliance.<sup>23</sup> A joint report by Russian and Chinese scholars sees “elements of a military-political alliance,” albeit not legally binding, emerging between the two countries.<sup>24</sup> The report argues that, “if need be, the ties can be converted into an alliance relationship without long preparations.”<sup>25</sup>

Since a hot war between contemporary great powers is becoming more and more unthinkable due to the enormous destructive force of nuclear warheads and other modern arms, warfare is migrating into

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the SCS controversy. See, “Main Points of Speech by Deputy Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation Dr. Anatoly Antonov at the 14th Asia Security Summit ‘The Shangri-La Dialogue,’” Singapore, May 30, 2015, <http://www.iiss.org/en/events/shangri-la-dialogue/archive/shangri-la-dialogue-2015-862b/special-sessions-315c/antonov-da7d>.

22. Feng Yujun, “Reflections on the Strengthening of Sino-Russian Relations of Comprehensive Strategic Interaction and Partnership against the Background of High Turbulence in International Relations,” (in Russian) in *Rossiysko-Kitayskiye Otnosheniya: Sostoyaniye i Perspektivy Razvitiya* [Russia-China Relations; the present state and the prospects for further development], Konstantin Kokorev and Boris Volkhonsky (eds.) (Moscow: Russian Institute of Strategic Studies, 2014), pp. 51-53.
23. Dmitri Trenin, “From Greater Europe to Greater Asia: The Sino-Russian Entente” (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, April 2015), [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP\\_Trenin\\_To\\_Asia\\_WEB\\_2015Eng.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_Trenin_To_Asia_WEB_2015Eng.pdf).
24. Igor Ivanov, ed., *Rossiysko-Kitayskiy Dialog: Model' 2015* [Russia-China Dialogue: 2015 Model] (Moscow: Russian International Affairs Council, 2015), p. 6.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

the domain of trade and finance. In the twenty-first century, economic sanctions are becoming weapons of choice in the conflicts between major powers. This is what Russia, penalized by the West, has amply experienced in the Ukraine crisis. And this is what China may face, if and when it clashes with the United States. Thus, mutual geo-economic support becomes crucial for Moscow and Beijing. The bond with China will give Russia a considerable degree of economic independence from the sanctions-prone West, providing an alternative source of finance and capital goods. In return, China will enjoy secure overland access to Russia's vast reserves of natural resources, especially oil and gas, so that its voracious economy can continue functioning even in the event of a U.S.-imposed naval blockade.<sup>26</sup> Chinese strategists seem to take this scenario quite seriously.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the growing closeness, Russo-Chinese relationship is not free of distrust and residual fears. Russia, as a weaker party in the dyad, feels somewhat uneasy about its increasing dependence on China, particularly in the economic dimension. Russia's biggest concern about China, albeit Russian officials nowadays avoid discussing it publicly, is that Beijing may at some point in the future claim back the Russian Far East whose southern part was under the Qing's nominal sovereignty until the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> That said, absent changes in the countries' autocratic political regimes, and

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26. Judging from the debate among U.S. security specialists, economic strangulation of China by means of a naval blockade may be emerging as the optimal strategy for dealing with China in a major conflict. See, for example, Sean Mirski, "Stranglehold: The Context, Conduct and Consequences of an American Naval Blockade of China," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no. 3 (2013), pp. 10-11. See also, T. X. Hammes, "Offshore Control is the Answer," (U.S. Naval Institute, December 2012), <http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2012-12/offshore-control-answer>.

27. Andrew Erickson and Gabriel Collins, "China's Oil Security Pipe Dream," *Naval War College Review* 63, no. 2 (Spring 2010), p. 90. See also, Kenji Horiuchi, "Russia and Energy Cooperation in East Asia," in *Russia and East Asia: Informal and Gradual Integration*, Tsuneo Akaha and Anna Vassilieva (eds.), p. 165.

28. Rensselaer Lee and Artyom Lukin, *Russia's Far East: New Dynamics in Asia Pacific and Beyond* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2015).

with the United States being viewed as the principal foe by both Moscow and Beijing, the Sino-Russian axis is likely to grow stronger.

## **Evolution of Russia's Korean Peninsula Policies and the China Factor**

Since the end of the Cold War, Russia's stance on the geopolitics of the Korean Peninsula has changed several times. In broad strokes, three periods can be identified in Russia's relations with the Koreans.

### ***1990s: Abandoning Pyongyang for Seoul***

Since the division of the Korean Peninsula into two hostile political entities, Moscow had recognized the North as the only legitimate Korean state and maintained alliance with it while treating the South as only a "territory" and a U.S. "puppet" rather than a sovereign state. That said, in the early 1980s, the Soviet leadership had to acknowledge that the DPRK had started to lag behind the ROK in economic development. Moscow began to view Seoul as a potential economic partner, especially with regard to the Russian Far East. In political terms, Kremlin began to give consideration to the fact that the ROK could have its own foreign policy interests, not identical or subordinate to those of the United States.<sup>29</sup> However, the downing of a KAL passenger jet in the Soviet airspace in late August 1983 ruled out any possibility for an early rapprochement between Moscow and Seoul. Instead, the final major spike in the Cold War tensions between the USSR and the United States, which occurred in the first half of the 1980s, led to the strengthening of Soviet-North Korean ties, with Kim Il-sung visiting Moscow twice, in 1984 and 1986. The summits with the Soviet leaders secured Pyongyang a significant amount of Soviet

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29. Vasily Mikheev, "Russian Strategic Thinking toward North and South Korea," in *Russian Strategic Thought toward Asia*, Gilbert Rozman, Kazuhiko Togo and Joseph P. Ferguson (eds.) (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 188.

military assistance as well as a commitment to help North Korea develop its civilian nuclear program. Yet by the late 1980s, relations between Moscow and Pyongyang began to deteriorate, largely due to North Korean displeasure over Gorbachev's reforms and Soviet worries about the growing risks of nuclear proliferation activities by the DPRK.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, Moscow rapidly moved toward normalization of diplomatic relations with Seoul. The Soviet Union took part in the 1988 Seoul Olympics. In 1990, Gorbachev had a meeting with the ROK President Roh Tae-woo in San Francisco that resulted in the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries the same year. Seoul's agreement to give cash-strapped Moscow USD 3 billion in loans, with pledges of further economic cooperation, played an important role in Kremlin's decision to recognize the South even at the price of offending Pyongyang.

The final collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the emergence in Moscow of Boris Yeltsin's administration that avowed principles of liberal democracy and saw Russia as a close partner of the West dealt a huge blow to Russian-North Korean relations. In the first half of the 1990s, the newly democratic Russia essentially abandoned its long-time ally, the DPRK, and shifted priority to the ROK. In November 1992, Yeltsin and Roh Tae-woo held a summit in Seoul, signing a framework treaty on the basic principles of bilateral relations. In June 1994, President Kim Young-sam visited Moscow. Commercial exchanges registered rapid expansion, mostly thanks to the influx of South Korean consumer products into the Russian market. The two sides even discussed the sales of Russian military hardware to the ROK. At the same time, economic and military ties between Russia and the North dropped to almost zero. Moscow saw the DPRK as a totalitarian pariah state with no future. Many decisionmakers in Moscow believed that North Korea was close to collapse and had nothing against the absorption of the DPRK by the ROK on South Korean terms. An additional factor in Kremlin's unfriendliness toward the DPRK was

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30. Mikheev, "Russian Strategic Thinking toward North and South Korea," pp. 191-192.

the fact that Pyongyang maintained active ties with the communist opposition to the Yeltsin regime.<sup>31</sup>

Until the mid-1990s, Moscow's policies on the Korean Peninsula issues aligned with — or, to put it more accurately, followed — those of Seoul, Washington, and Tokyo. This was due to several factors, such as Russia's desire to act on the international stage in agreement with the West, its preoccupation with multiple domestic crises, and hopes to get material benefits from South Korea in the form of preferential loans, investments, and technologies.

During the North Korean nuclear crisis of 1993-1994, Russia mostly was a passive observer, effectively siding with the United States and even supporting the U.S. threat of imposing UN sanctions against the DPRK.<sup>32</sup> In 1995, Moscow formally notified Pyongyang that the alliance treaty of 1961 committing the USSR to the defense of the DPRK had become obsolete and needed to be replaced with another treaty not containing a mutual defense clause.<sup>33</sup>

However, by the second half of the 1990s, concerns were increasingly raised in Moscow that the heavy tilt toward Seoul at the expense of Pyongyang only served to undermine Russia's positions in North-east Asia without giving it any tangible benefits. Moscow was getting unhappy with the fact that the four-party group, consisting of the DPRK, the ROK, the United States, and China, was emerging as the main mechanism to deal with the Korean Peninsula issues — with Russia being left out. Moscow also felt that Seoul showed less interest in Russia after it had scaled down its ties with the North. Russia's new Foreign Minister Evgeny Primakov, who in 1996 replaced the

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31. Vasily Mikheev, "Russian Policy towards the Korean Peninsula after Yeltsin's Reelection as President," *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 11, no. 2 (1997), pp. 348-77.

32. Georgy Toloraya, "Korean Peninsula and Russia: the problems of interaction" (in Russian), *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn'* [International Affairs], November 2002, [http://world.lib.ru/k/kim\\_o\\_i/a9616.shtml](http://world.lib.ru/k/kim_o_i/a9616.shtml).

33. Final Report on the Project "Russia-Korea relations in the Architecture of Northeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific" (Gorbachev Foundation, February 2003), [http://www.gorby.ru/activity/conference/show\\_70/view\\_13120/](http://www.gorby.ru/activity/conference/show_70/view_13120/).

pro-Western Andrei Kozyrev, made efforts to correct the policy with the aim of mending relations with Pyongyang and raising Russia's profile in Korean affairs. However, Moscow's hand was still too weak to make any noticeable impact on the Peninsula's strategic equation.

### ***2000-2013: Striving for an Independent Role and Multipolar Equilibrium***

With Vladimir Putin's coming to power in 2000 and Russia's recovery from the chaos of the 1990s, Moscow had more resources — and more political will — to pursue pro-active and independent foreign policies. Besides, by the late 1990s, the divergence of views on some key issues between Russia and the West became obvious. Russia now felt much less obliged to defer to the West — and Seoul — on the Korean Peninsula questions. At the same time, predictions of the imminent fall of the North Korean regime had proved to be wrong. It became clear to Moscow that the DPRK was not destined for an inevitable implosion and, indeed, could continue for quite a long time. Furthermore, with the economic situation in Russia rapidly improving, Moscow no longer needed South Korea's largesse, especially considering the disappointing fact that hopes for large South Korean investments had not materialized in the 1990s.

Moscow saw an opportunity to heighten Russia's international influence and prestige by reinserting itself into the Korean Peninsula politics through restoring links with the DPRK. The Putin administration judged — correctly — that rebuilding ties with Pyongyang, while preserving good relations with Seoul, would again make Russia a player to be reckoned with in Northeast Asia. The new policy manifested itself in the highest level visits. Putin went to Pyongyang in 2000, becoming the first Russian leader to visit North Korea, while Kim Jong-il traveled to Russia in 2001, 2002 and 2011. In 2003, Russia also became the founding member of the six-party talks, reportedly at the insistence of Pyongyang, thus institutionalizing and legitimizing Moscow's role on the Korean Peninsula.

During that period, Russia was careful to pursue equidistance —

or equal closeness — in relations with Seoul and Pyongyang regarding security issues. Recognizing the South's concerns about the North's development of nuclear and ballistic weapons and disapproving of Pyongyang's provocative statements and actions, Moscow simultaneously pointed to the need to safeguard the DPRK's "legitimate" security interests. Russia supported the United Nations Security Council sanctions punishing North Korea for its nuclear and ballistic missile program, but Moscow, along with Beijing, worked to take the edge off the sanctions as opposed to harsher measures backed by the United States and Japan.<sup>34</sup> Throughout the 2000s, Moscow's stance on North Korea was close to Beijing's. However, that similarity was not due to Russia's subordination of its North Korea policy to China's wishes but rather stemmed from the convergence of interests: neither Moscow nor Beijing wanted a North Korean implosion, an outcome considered likely under stiffer sanctions.

Moscow did not explicitly call for the continuation of the status quo on the Korean Peninsula, but its emphasis on the need to seek "peaceful diplomatic solutions" to the North Korean issue in effect meant conservation of the existing geopolitical realities and preservation of North Korea as a sovereign entity. The prevailing view in the Russian foreign policy community was that North Korean collapse would likely cause radical changes in the Northeast Asian balance of power that might be detrimental to Russia's national interests. The proponents of this view argued that the forced demise of North Korea would essentially mean the revision of the World War II outcomes. They were concerned that an isolated and weakened North Korea would be annexed by U.S.-allied South Korea, expanding the U.S. sphere of influence in Northeast Asia and probably even seeing U.S. troops arriving in North Korea. That was why Moscow needed to maintain good relations with Pyongyang and help keep it afloat,

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34. Until 2008, under the administrations of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, the ROK generally sided with China and Russia, being in favor of a more accommodating approach to North Korea, whereas the succeeding conservative administrations of Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye have taken a much tougher stance on Pyongyang, more in line with the U.S. position.

despite the eccentricity of the Kims' dynastic regime.<sup>35</sup>

Nonetheless, in the 2000s, Moscow's commitment to preservation of the DPRK was not without serious reservations. At that time, it seemed quite likely that Moscow would at some point conclude that continuation of the North Korean regime was not in its interests and benefited China much more than Russia. After all, it was Chinese, not Russian, companies that enjoyed the dominant position in North Korea. Furthermore, even if U.S. troops were to be stationed in North Korea after unification, they would be of much more concern to China than to Russia, if only because China shared a much longer border with North Korea (China's border with North Korea is 1,416 kilometers long while Russia's is only 19 kilometers).

One also had to consider the economic gains that Russia was well positioned to reap as a result of Korean unification. Major projects that were stalled due to the inter-Korean conflict, such as a gas pipeline from Russia to Korea and the linking of Korean railways to the Russian Trans-Siberian Railway, would go ahead if the North Korean problem was finally resolved. More generally, North Korea was basically an economic wasteland, with very little commercial opportunities for the neighboring Russian Far East (RFE). Moreover, it separated Russia from the powerhouse of South Korean economy. Korean unification would give the RFE overland access to a single market of 75 million people with high demand for Russian commodities.

Lastly, Moscow was not happy with North Korea's steady progress in the development of nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles. First, because of the immediate safety and security risks this posed to the RFE and, second, because the increase in the number of nuclear powers devalued Russia's own nuclear deterrent, undermining a crucial basis of Moscow's great-power standing in the world.

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35. Georgy Toloraya, "Another Cycle of the Korean Crisis, 2008-2010: Russia's Interests and the Prospects for Getting out of the Korean Impasse" (in Russian), *Problemy Dal'nego Vostoka* [Far Eastern Affairs], no. 5 (September-October 2010), pp. 3-19. See also Igor Tolstokulakov, "Korea, Russia and the 21st-Century Challenges," in *Russia, America, and Security in the Asia-Pacific*, Rouben Azizian (ed.) (Honolulu: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2006).

Such considerations might have eventually led Moscow to a tougher stance on Pyongyang and acceptance of a swift Korean unification, even if it should have been carried out as absorption of North Korea by a pro-U.S. South Korea. As Dmitri Trenin argued, unlike Beijing, Kremlin did not worry much about the prospect of North Korea disappearing from the political map since Pyongyang served as a protective buffer for China rather than Russia.<sup>36</sup>

In the 2000s and up to the Ukraine crisis, Russia's preferred geopolitical vision for Northeast Asia was one of rules-based multipolar balance of power — a concert of powers in which Moscow would be one of the participants. Russia did not particularly like America's military-political hegemony in the region. But neither did it want Chinese predominance, despite the "strategic partnership" with Beijing. A unified Korea, with reduced security dependence on Washington and more clout vis-à-vis Beijing and Tokyo, was seen by many in Moscow as instrumental in establishing a power equilibrium in Northeast Asia that would be resistant to the dominance of any single actor. That constituted one more reason for Russia's potential interest in Korean unification.

Perhaps even a unified Korea that retained some form of security ties with the United States could have been acceptable to Moscow, as long as Russia's relations with Washington were reasonably tolerable — neither very friendly, nor adversarial — just the way they stood in the 2000s. This contrasted with China's stance: Beijing obviously preferred to keep Korea divided rather than seeing a united and strong country on China's borders, unless, of course, a unified Korea recognized itself as part of the Chinese strategic sphere of influence, a very unlikely prospect.

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36. Dmitri Trenin, "Post-Imperium: A Eurasian Story" (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2012), p. 194, <http://carnegieendowment.org/pdf/book/post-imperium.pdf>.

***2014 and Beyond: Tilting toward Pyongyang***

The Ukraine crisis that started to unfold in 2013 and culminated in 2014 profoundly transformed Russia's foreign policy. The competition with the United States that hitherto had been tempered by significant amount of bilateral engagement and cooperation turned into bitter enmity, while Moscow made moves to consolidate its strategic partnership with Beijing into something resembling a quasi-alliance. This has had considerable repercussions for Russia's approaches to the Korean Peninsula, visible in the rapid improvement of Russia-North Korea ties and the mounting difficulties in Russia-South Korea relations.

During 2014 and 2015, Russian-North Korean relations have remarkably grown in intensity. There has been a flurry of high-level visit exchanges. Since February 2014, the DPRK Supreme People's Assembly Presidium Chairman Kim Yong-nam, Minister of External Economic Relations Ri Ryong-nam, Foreign Minister Ri Su-yong, Kim Jong-un's special envoy Choe Ryong-hae, Supreme People's Assembly Chairman Choe Thae-bok and other senior officials visited Russia.<sup>37</sup> Russia reciprocated by sending to Pyongyang multiple delegations, including Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Trutnev and Minister for the Russian Far East Development Alexander Galushka. Although the expected visit of the DPRK's supreme leader Kim Jong-un to Moscow for the celebrations of the 70th anniversary of victory over Nazi Germany did not materialize (Pyongyang was instead represented by Kim Yong-nam, the number two in the DPRK state hierarchy), this did not slow the momentum of Russia-North Korea reinvigorated ties, with 2015 designated as the Year of Friendship of Russia and the DPRK. In November 2015, Moscow and Pyongyang signed an agreement on "preventing dangerous military activity." The agreement, concluded at the level of the two countries' general staffs, was an indication of increased military contacts between Russia and the

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37. Pavel Cherkashin, "Current Russian-North Korean Relations and Prospects of Their Development" (Russian International Affairs Council, August 24, 2015), [http://russiancouncil.ru/en/blogs/dvfu/?id\\_4=2022](http://russiancouncil.ru/en/blogs/dvfu/?id_4=2022).

DPRK.<sup>38</sup>

On the economic front, there have also been a number of significant developments:

- The issue of North Korea's debt to Russia (inherited from the Soviet era) was finally settled.
- The upgrade of the 54-kilometer railway link from Russia's Khasan to the North Korean port of Rajin was completed, along with the modernization of the Rajin port facilities. The project was financed by the state-owned Russian Railways. This allows the use of the port of Rajin for transshipment of cargos coming via the Trans-Siberian from Russia bound for China, South Korea and other Asia-Pacific countries. Moreover, Khasan-Rajin project is considered as the first stage of the grand design to link up the Russian Trans-Siberian mainline with the prospective Trans-Korean Railway.
- North Korea agreed to relax visa regulations for Russian business-people and facilitate their work activities in the DPRK.
- Russia and the DPRK have made steps to use rubles in their commercial transactions. In particular, it was announced that Russian businesses doing trade through North Korea's Foreign Trade Bank can make payments in rubles.<sup>39</sup>
- Russian-North Korean Business Council was set up.
- Negotiations are underway to lease large tracts of agricultural land in the RFE (in Khabarovsk Krai) for North Koreans to cultivate.
- The construction of a cross-border automobile bridge connecting Russian and North Korean sides of the Tumen River, in addition to the existing railway link, is now under discussion.

These and other developments indicate that Russia-North Korea ties are now at their highest point since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Both being ostracized by the West and subjected to harsh sanctions, Russia and the DPRK now evidently feel more empathy with each other. Moscow sees Pyongyang as one of the few countries that are

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38. Leo Byrne, "N. Korea, Russia Sign Military Agreement," *NK News*, November 13, 2015.

39. Russia, Ministry for the Far East Development, Press Release, January 14, 2015, [http://minvostokrazvitia.ru/press-center/news\\_minvostok/?ELEMENT\\_ID=2862](http://minvostokrazvitia.ru/press-center/news_minvostok/?ELEMENT_ID=2862).

not afraid of openly challenging the U.S.-led international order. In particular, North Korea expressed support for Russia over Crimea. In turn, Moscow defended the DPRK at the UN Security Council when it voted, along with China, against the inclusion of the issue of human rights in North Korea on the UNSC agenda.<sup>40</sup> Moscow also probably wants to use its increased support for North Korea as additional leverage in the dealings with the West, Seoul and Tokyo, while North Korea needs Russia to reduce its extreme dependence on China.

Contrasting with the renaissance of Russia-North Korea friendship, Moscow's relations with Seoul have soured somewhat. Unlike Japan, South Korea has refused to formally sanction Russia over Ukraine. However, being an America's ally, Seoul cannot but take into account the state of U.S.-Russian relations. Similar to Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, ROK's President Park Geun-hye declined Putin's invitation to attend the Victory Day celebrations in Moscow in May 2015 sending instead a low-ranking representative. Weighing current political risks, many Korean firms suspended their investment plans in Russia. Moscow, for its part, expressed strong disapproval of Seoul's intentions to host America's THAAD missile defense system.<sup>41</sup>

Trilateral projects, involving Russia, and North and South Korea, are making very little progress, primarily because Seoul is still reluctant to commit to them in a substantial way. For example, despite an agreement reached during the summit between Putin and Park Geun-hye in November 2013, South Korea has not yet made any investments in the Khasan-Rajin project. As of October 2015, South Korean involvement in the Rajin venture has been limited to just two "test shipments" of Siberian coal to Pohang. Similarly, the Trans-Korean gas pipeline project has never got off the ground, even though a "road map" for its implementation was signed by Gazprom and Kogas in September 2011. Russia is also unhappy about the lack of Korean investment in the Russian Far East. There are practically no major

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40. Ankit Panda, "North Korean Human Rights Abuses on the Agenda at UN Security Council," *The Diplomat*, December 23, 2014.

41. "U.S. THAAD Installation in South Korea Poses Security Threat to Russia?" *Sputnik*, April 3, 2015.

projects funded by South Korean capital in the RFE. Russian officials are openly expressing their disappointment over the fact that countless declarations of intent for economic collaboration are not translating into real actions, with the South Korean side dragging its feet.<sup>42</sup>

South Korea's alliance with the United States is making Russia-ROK relations more problematic. Prior to the Ukraine crisis, Russia tended to separate the European security agenda from the Asia-Pacific one. While NATO was viewed as a major concern, Moscow did not care much about the network of U.S.-led alliances in the Asia-Pacific. After Ukraine, such compartmentalization is no longer possible. U.S.-Russian relations in the Asia-Pacific have started to acquire the same confrontational pitch as seen in Eastern Europe. Washington has leaned on its East Asian allies to sign up to the sanctions regime against Russia. At the same time, Moscow has stepped up its criticism of the U.S. alliances in Asia, portraying them as the main destabilizing force in the region. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, after talks with his Chinese counterpart in Beijing, expressed "concern over U.S. attempts to strengthen its military and political clout in the Asia-Pacific" and called for the establishment of "a collective regional security system."<sup>43</sup> Never before has a high-ranking Russian official made such explicit remarks challenging the U.S.-centered security order in East Asia. To reinforce the message, Russian strategic bombers increased their activities in the Pacific, circling Guam during one especially provocative mission.<sup>44</sup>

Seoul, along with Tokyo, is perceived by Moscow as a junior and compliant military-political partner of Washington. Thus, the rising confrontation between Russia and the United States inevitably casts a shadow over Moscow's relations with America's loyal allies. Of special concern to Moscow is the prospect of an integrated missile

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42. "Remarks by Alexei Starichkov, Director of International Cooperation Department, Primorsky Krai Regional Government," *PrimaMedia*, September 15, 2015.

43. "Russia, China Seek to Form Asia-Pacific Collective Security System Defense Minister," TASS, November 18, 2015.

44. Bill Gertz, "Russian Bombers Threaten Guam," *Washington Free Beacon*, November 19, 2014.

defense system involving the United States, Japan and South Korea, which partially explains Kremlin's harsh reaction to the plans of THAAD deployment on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>45</sup>

In a similar fashion, since the inception of the Ukraine crisis, Moscow's position on the inter-Korean issues has changed. Whereas Russia, in accordance with its carefully balanced equidistant posture, avoided taking sides in the North-South antagonism in the past, it has since been tilting toward the DPRK. In their statements, Russian officials stress that the high level of tensions on the Peninsula is caused, to a large extent, by "the increasing scale of U.S.-ROK war games" and "the military activities by the United States on the Korean Peninsula and the surrounding areas."<sup>46</sup>

Russia remains officially committed to the goal of denuclearization of North Korea and favors the resumption of the six-party talks. However, Russia now accentuates the need for the U.S.-ROK alliance to scale down their military posture aimed at North Korea as a crucial condition for successful negotiation process with Pyongyang. At the same time, Moscow seems more willing to tolerate North Korea's nuclear shenanigans. The consensus is jelling in Russia's foreign policy making community that North Korea's denuclearization can at best be achieved only in the distant future.<sup>47</sup> What can realistically be accomplished is the freezing of further nuclear development by North Korea in exchange for the U.S.-ROK alliance reducing its military activities. Thus the DPRK should be treated as a *de facto* nuclear power which it proclaims itself.<sup>48</sup>

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45. Russia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Interview with Russia's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Igor Morgulov," September 2, 2015, [http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/briks/-/asset\\_publisher/RdIYjVvdPAwg/content/id/1731468](http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/briks/-/asset_publisher/RdIYjVvdPAwg/content/id/1731468).

46. Russia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Interview with Russian Ambassador to the DPRK Alexander Matsegora," June 25, 2015, [http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/kp/-/asset\\_publisher/VJy7Ilg5QaAII/content/id/1527489](http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/kp/-/asset_publisher/VJy7Ilg5QaAII/content/id/1527489).

47. Georgy Toloraya, "Korean Security and Unification Dilemmas: A Russian Perspective," (Korea Economic Institute of America Academic Paper Series, June 11, 2015), <http://www.keia.org/publication/korean-security-and-unification-dilemmas-russian-perspective>.

48. Author conversations with Russian officials and foreign policy experts

## Russia and China: Exchanging Korea for Ukraine?

Where does China stand in the Russia-North Korea relationship? According to one view that has gained some currency among South Korean experts, one of Russia's important objectives in expanding cooperation with the DPRK is "to check the growing influence of China" in the North.<sup>49</sup> Yet there is hardly any evidence to corroborate this claim. It may be true that Pyongyang seeks to diversify away from its overreliance on China by boosting partnership with Russia. However, as argued previously, Russia has its own motives to strengthen ties with the DPRK. Countering China is not one of them. Even if Russia tried to compete with China over North Korea, that would not be a major headache for Beijing. The Chinese are well aware that Russia is in no position to outperform China when it comes to economic exchanges with the DPRK. In 2014, Russia's trade with North Korea amounted to a mere USD 92 million while China-North Korea trade stood at USD 6.86 billion (90.6% of the North's total external trade). Even if Russia and North Korea manage to increase their trade to the amount of USD 1 billion by 2020, which is the official target,<sup>50</sup> that will still be a far cry from the Sino-North Korean commercial relationship. Russian investments in the North are limited to the Khasan-Rajin project. Given the unenviable condition of Russia's economy and the worsening shortage of funds even for domestic development needs, it is doubtful that Russia would be able to commit substantial financial resources for ventures in North Korea.<sup>51</sup> Rather than being

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(Vladivostok and Moscow, 2014-2015).

49. See, for example, Yi Seong-Woo, "Multilateral Cooperation in East Asia with the Connection of TKR-TSR," (paper presented at the conference on "Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative between Russia and South Korea," Vladivostok, Far Eastern Federal University, July 15, 2015).

50. "The Minister: Trade Turnover between Russia and the DPRK Can Reach \$1 billion by 2020," RIA Novosti, April 27, 2015.

51. In 2014, a major project called "Pobeda" ("Victory") was announced by Moscow under which Russia intends to make substantial investments, to the tune of USD 25 billion over 20 years, in North Korea's mining industry and infrastructure in exchange for gaining access to the DPRK's mineral wealth.

concerned about Russia's efforts to expand economic ties with the North, China may actually be welcoming them. After all, Beijing is known to have long pushed Pyongyang toward more liberal and open economy — something that will be facilitated by more trade and investment engagement with Russia.

Since the start of the six-party process, Russia and China have been largely aligned in their approaches resisting external attempts at regime change in North Korea and insisting that Pyongyang's legitimate security interests should be respected. This remains the case. However, an important change may be taking place in Russia's strategic thinking toward the Korean Peninsula. As noted previously, in the 2000s and early 2010s, Russia played an independent, albeit a relatively peripheral, role in the Korean Peninsula geopolitics. Moscow's interests coincided with Beijing's to a considerable degree, but Russia's ultimate goal was to secure a multipolar balance of power in Northeast Asia dominated neither by the United States nor China. In this regard, Beijing's preeminence on the Korean Peninsula would have been as unpalatable to Moscow as Washington's. However, by 2013-2014, Russia's mounting conflict with the West that culminated in the Ukraine crisis changed Moscow's calculus. First, the Ukraine mess has distracted Russia's attention and resources from East Asia, including the Korean Peninsula. Second, emotional anti-Americanism has permeated Russian foreign policy, making Washington's enemies Moscow's friends and poisoning Russia's relations with U.S. allies. Third, and perhaps most important, Russia's growing reliance on China is making Russia more receptive to Beijing's interests in the Asia-Pacific. One of Russia's leading experts on East Asia and Korea, Georgy Toloraya laments that Russia shows passivity in the Asia-Pacific affairs for fear that its more independent and proactive stance might anger China. In particular, Russia has "almost accepted Chinese domination in Korean affairs."<sup>52</sup>

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However, this project so far looks more like a vague declaration of intent rather than a specific business plan. The main problem, of course, is the absence of reliable funding.

52. Georgy Toloraya, "The Crisis-ridden Status-quo on the Korean Peninsula

Russia's growing willingness to play second fiddle to China in East Asia, and on the Korean Peninsula, reflects the reality that Moscow does not perceive this geographic area as its vital interest. To be sure, the Asia-Pacific, and especially the Korean Peninsula, is important to Moscow in many respects but its significance cannot be compared to Russian stakes in Ukraine and other post-Soviet regions — the places Russia is literally prepared to fight for. At the same time, China has fundamental interests in the Korean Peninsula and views Eastern Europe as a peripheral concern. This makes possible, and logical, a sort of geopolitical deal-making between Moscow and Beijing, with Russia sacrificing its great power aspirations in East Asia and showing deference to Beijing on the Korean Peninsula in return for China's tacit support in Kremlin's confrontation with the U.S.-led West over Ukraine.

One indication of Russia's growing strategic collaboration with China on the Peninsula issue has been the two countries' joint opposition to the THAAD missile defense system's prospective deployment in South Korea. In April 2015, Russia and China held the first round of the bilateral dialogue on security in Northeast Asia in which the THAAD issue was one of the main agenda items.<sup>53</sup> In military terms, the American-led missile defense in Northeast Asia is a much bigger threat to China's missile forces than Russia's. Thus, joining with China in condemning the THAAD plans, Moscow shows political solidarity with Beijing.

It may be expected that Moscow and Beijing will increasingly coordinate their positions on security issues in Northeast Asia and the Peninsula, thus gradually consolidating the emerging strategic divide of the U.S.-Japan-ROK trio versus the China-Russia axis.

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and Russia's Objectives" (in Russian), in *Aziatsko-Tixookeanskoe Sotrudnichestvo i Mesto Rossii v Regional'nom Razviti* [Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific and Russia's place in the region's development], Konstantin Kokarev, Elena Suponina, and Boris Volkhonsky, eds. (Moscow: Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, 2014), p. 104.

53. Russia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Interview with Russia's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Igor Morgulov."

However, the real importance of Sino-Russian collaboration on the Peninsula may be revealed in case of a North Korean contingency. Although the collapse of the DPRK's current regime is by no means imminent, the situation in the North is basically unpredictable. The regime may continue for another fifty years, but it is almost as likely that it will start falling apart in one year. The two players that would have the highest stakes in the event of a North Korean implosion are obviously the ROK and China. One can argue that, for Seoul and Beijing, the North is as significant as Ukraine is for Moscow. They will seek to control the process of the regime's collapse and shape its outcome in order to secure their own interests in the northern part of the Peninsula.

Even though China admittedly has a substantial leverage over North Korea, it may need Russian support if and when the DPRK begins to crumble. Apart from China and the ROK, Russia is the only country neighboring North Korea. Moreover, unlike the DMZ, Russia's border with the North is not heavily militarized. This could make it easier for Russia to intervene, jointly with China, in the DPRK. Russia's rich experience in carrying out military and hybrid warfare operations in recent years — from Chechnya to Crimea — will certainly be an extra asset for China that has not tested its armed force since 1979 (when it launched an offensive against Vietnam). Putin's bold intervention in Syria underscored Russia's increased willingness — and capacity — to undertake military gambles in foreign countries.

Swift coordinated actions by China and Russia will guarantee that the outcome of a North Korean contingency will be in accordance with their geopolitical interests. Beijing would aim for the stabilization of the North and installment of a new regime loyal to China while preventing the absorption of the DPRK by the South. Russia will back Beijing's game, especially if China allows Moscow to retain some degree of influence over North Korea. If China and Russia act in lockstep in a North Korean crisis, Seoul's chances to achieve unification with the North on its own terms are reduced to near zero.

Intervening in the North, China and Russia will most likely rely on the DPRK elite, several million people who are close to power and

enjoy privileges. The North Korean ruling class is well aware of the unenviable fate that befell East Germany's communist establishment after Germany's unification. Indeed, in a unified Korea the DPRK's aristocracy would likely get a much harsher treatment than in Germany's case. Such considerations may lead the North's elite to collaborate with China and Russia, even though foreign intervention might run against the feelings of North Korean nationalism.

What can Seoul do to prevent Russia from colluding with China on North Korea? Very little. The ROK barely has any leverage over Russia, whereas China's influence on Russia is substantial — and growing. Politically, Moscow and Seoul are not tied by any substantive mutual commitments, while Moscow maintains a quasi-alliance relationship with Beijing. On the economic front, China is Russia's number one trading partner, with bilateral trade totaling USD 87.6 billion in 2014 (by comparison, Russia-South Korea trade in the same year was USD 26.6 billion). The stock of South Korea's investment in Russia, in 2014, stood at USD 2.1 billion,<sup>54</sup> while China's accumulated investment in Russia amounted to USD 7.6 billion (as of 2013).<sup>55</sup> The Western sanctions have made China even more indispensable for Russia as a trade and investment partner.

For the Russian Far East (RFE), Japan and South Korea still rank as the biggest trading partners, accounting, respectively, for 26.3 and 26.2 percent of the RFE's foreign trade in 2014. This is slightly ahead of China's share of 26.1 percent.<sup>56</sup> However, if one takes into account the so-called informal cross-border commerce that flourishes between China and the RFE and is not registered by official statistics, China

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54. Russia, Embassy in the ROK, "Russia's Relations with the ROK," last modified September 25, 2015, [http://russian-embassy.org/ru/?page\\_id=111](http://russian-embassy.org/ru/?page_id=111).

55. Russia, Ministry of Economic Development, "The Main Results of Investment Cooperation of Russia and China," last modified September 25, 2015, [http://www.ved.gov.ru/exportcountries/cn/cn\\_ru\\_relations/cn\\_rus\\_projects/](http://www.ved.gov.ru/exportcountries/cn/cn_ru_relations/cn_rus_projects/).

56. Russia, Federal Customs Service, "The Review of the Russian Far East's Foreign Trade in 2014," last modified September 25, 2015, <http://dvtu.customs.ru/attachments/article/16235/%D0%94%D0%92%20%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%B7%D0%BE%D1%80.doc>.

will emerge as the RFE's top trade partner.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, unlike China and Japan, South Korea is not engaged in any major business projects in the RFE.

## Conclusion

Sino-Russian relations are now at their highest point since the mid-1950s. Some would even argue that the two countries are on the verge of reinstating a full-blown alliance. In the 2000s, Moscow envisioned a single European space from Lisbon to Vladivostok that would be based on shared values, interests, and partnership with the European Union. Today, the Russian leadership talks of building a continental Eurasian "common economic space" in collaboration with China.<sup>58</sup>

The question is how durable this new edition of Sino-Russian entente is going to be. We may expect that the Moscow-Beijing axis will continue to exist, and possibly grow even stronger, as long as the leaders in Kremlin and Zhongnanhai perceive a common overriding threat from the world's only superpower, which both see as opposing Russia's and China's legitimate geopolitical interests and trying to undermine the two countries' political systems and social values.

In Moscow's bitter confrontation with the West, China is the only geo-economic alternative available to Russia. On the other hand, as long as there is a real risk of China clashing with the United States (over the South China Sea, Taiwan, or the Senkakus), the strong bond with Russia — the only major power that can provide Beijing with diplomatic support, military technology, and secure access to vital commodities — will be crucial for the PRC. Absent changes in the

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57. Author interview with Natalya Ryzhova, Research Fellow with the Institute for Economic Research, Far Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Vladivostok, February 2015).

58. Russia, Kremlin, "Press Statement by Vladimir Putin Following Russian-Chinese Talks," May 8, 2015, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/49433>.

countries' political regimes, and with the United States being viewed as the principal foe by both Moscow and Beijing, the Sino-Russian axis will only grow stronger.

The entente of Russia and China, Northeast Asia's two major powers, will have an inevitable impact on the Korean Peninsula. Russia's post-Cold War policies toward the Korean Peninsula have passed through several stages. In the 1990s, Moscow abandoned Pyongyang in favor of Seoul, but ceased to be a player of consequence in the Peninsula's international politics. In the 2000s and early 2010s, Russia made efforts to restore its influence on the Korean Peninsula, pursuing balanced relations with both Seoul and Pyongyang while aiming for a multipolar equilibrium in Northeast Asia.

The drastic deterioration of Russia's relations with the West that was precipitated by the Ukraine crisis has had a noticeable impact on Russia's Korea strategy. Since around 2014, two major determinants have emerged in Russia's foreign policies, including those toward Korea. The first determinant is intense anti-Americanism, while the second is the rising dependence on China.

Russia's relations with North Korea have warmed considerably driven, to a large extent, by their shared enmity toward the United States. At the same time, Russia's relations with South Korea, a U.S. ally, have cooled. Prior to Ukraine, Russia could see at least some benefits in the North being annexed by the ROK. Post-Ukraine, a Korea unified on Seoul's terms, and hence an American ally, is anathema to Russia.

The standoff with the West has led Russia to strengthen its strategic partnership with China. This comes with a price, though. In exchange for China's benevolent neutrality with regard to Russia's actions in Ukraine, Moscow needs to acknowledge Chinese primacy in East Asia. It appears that Russia is prepared to drop its own great power ambitions in Northeast Asia and play second fiddle to China concerning the Peninsula affairs.

The Sino-Russian collaboration on Korea will be critical, if and when the DPRK regime starts to crumble. If China and Russia execute a swift and coordinated intervention in North Korea in order to prevent

the DPRK's annexation by the South and install a friendly regime, there is very little Seoul could do to prevent such a scenario.

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## Russian Policy towards the Korean Unification

Sergey Lukonin

The article highlights the security problem of the Korean Peninsula and the related Russia's policy, as well as identifying the major differences between the Korean policy of the USSR and Russia. The analysis is focused on the main factors that can affect Russia's position with regard to the Korean unification at the moment — such as the “Ukrainian crisis,” “sanction regime,” “Russia's turn to the East” and realization of the Silk Road Economic Belt planned by China. Another part of the analysis is focused on such subjects as: possibilities to realize multilateral projects by Russia, South Korea, North Korea, and China; prospects for unification of Korea as well as the opportunities that Russia could gain therefrom. Besides, the article offers recommendations for the more active cooperation between Russia and South Korea.

In general, activation of Russia's policy vis-à-vis North Korea is mostly of demonstrative nature. It shows intents, first, to demonstrate to the EU and U.S. that the policy designed to isolate Russia is insolvent, and second, to find a counterweight to balance the growing dependence on China. The announced economic projects most probably would not be realized or, if otherwise, will be done on the minimal, “advertising” scale.

The full-scope of cooperation with South Korea would not be possible unless Korea is unified — for example, in the form of North Korea's absorption by the South Korea.

**Keywords:** Security, Korean Peninsula, Unification, the role of Russia, Russia's turn to the East

### Russian Policy towards the Korean Unification: The Recent Changes

In the short-term perspective, the new Russian tilt towards North Korea can influence the relations between South Korea and North Korea. Russia can start to repeat the North Korean demagoguery about

the North-South dialogue resumption without any conditions.

In that context, President Park Geun-hye's tough policy (departure from Sunshine Policy and the continuation of cooperation only in the case of reciprocal steps by North Korea) and Seoul initiatives (Park Geun-hye's Eurasia Initiative) appear to be effective. However, the development of engagements excluding the real intentions of the North Korean regime seems to be dangerous. The North Korean regime is not ready for a real dialogue (even less ready than during Kim Jong-il's reign).

In 2013, North Korea declared itself as a nuclear weapons state (the corresponding changes were amended in its constitution). This means the impossibility of holding the six-party talks, and therefore, needing to change the approach to the talks. There is a possibility that Russia can continue to support the six-party talks (in fact it is a discussion of changes in the Constitution of North Korea now) and but not the firm position of Seoul.

The modern Russian policy towards the Korean Peninsula is determined by traditional and new factors.

**Traditional factors are still the same:** Russia as a responsible nuclear power does not recognize North Korea's rights of possession of nuclear weapons; Russia supports the unification of North and South Korea on a market basis; Russia is ready for cooperation with North Korea but the political regime of North Korea does not contribute to this.

**New factor** is the worsening of relations with the U.S. because of the Ukrainian crisis. This is an indirect influence rather than direct. Under the conditions of "war of sanctions," Russia is looking for cooperation in the East as an alternative to one with the EU and the United States. Main partner is China. But because of the fear of overdependence, Russia is trying to find a balance between China, Japan, and South Korea. At the same time, Japan joined the sanctions regime, and the development of cooperation with South Korea is not enough to balance the overdependence on China.

Against this background, the idea to develop cooperation with North Korea was raised. In addition, the fact that North Korea is

under the regime of UN sanctions also attracts the interest of Russian political elite.

This interest in North Korea as one of the partners in the East determines the economic and diplomatic policy of Russia. In 2015, the activity in terms of visits to North Korea by Russian officials and meetings with North Koreans in the territory of Russia was quite frequent.

In March 2014, Russian Minister for the Development of the Far East Alexander Galushka visited North Korea.<sup>1</sup> In February 2015, Moscow hosted the first meeting of the Russia-DPRK Business Council.<sup>2</sup>

In the same month, there was a meeting between the Minister of Foreign Economic Affairs of the DPRK Ri Ryong-nam and Vice Governor of Khabarovsk Region Sergey Schetnyov.<sup>3</sup>

In April 2015, Pyongyang hosted the 7th meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission on Trade-Economic and Scientific-Technical Cooperation with Russia.<sup>4</sup>

The meeting of the Commission was attended by such large Russian companies as "RusHydro," "Gazprom," "Sever," and "Northern Mines" ("*Severnye priiski*").<sup>5</sup>

In July, Russian businessmen visited the DPRK to promote projects in the field of iron and steel, including producing cold-rolled steel, upgrading the capacity of the Kim Chaek steel complex, and increasing pig iron production.<sup>6</sup>

In September 2015, during the East Economic Forum, Alexander

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1. Andrei Lankov, "Who benefits from Russia's breakthrough using North Korea?" (in Russian), *Slon*, June 9, 2015.
  2. Russia, Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East, "Enhancing cooperation of Russia-North Korea was discussed at the Eastern Economic Forum" (in Russian), September 3, 2015. Retrieved from: [http://minvostokrazvitia.ru/press-center/news\\_minvostok/?ELEMENT\\_ID=3590](http://minvostokrazvitia.ru/press-center/news_minvostok/?ELEMENT_ID=3590).
  3. "What is to Learn: Russia and the DPRK Strengthen Cooperation" (in Russian), *Agentstvo Biznes Novostej*, March 11, 2015.
  4. Ibid.
  5. Ibid.
  6. Ibid.

Galushka and Ri Ryong-nam discussed the implementation of the decisions and arrangements of the 7th meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission on trade-economic and scientific-technical cooperation between Russia and the DPRK.<sup>7</sup>

The main themes in Russian-North Korean cooperation remain: construction and modernization of infrastructure, exploration of the natural resources, and the recovery and renovation of enterprises built during the Soviet Union.

In theory, trade and investment cooperation plays a positive role. However, Russian planes do not take into account the specificity of North Korea: command and distribution system, black/gray economy, and quasi-market activity in the absence of a legal field, closed and totalitarian nature of the regime that spurns changes, as well as the nuclear factor.

These circumstances are likely to lead to the situation where projects fail to be realized, or stop functioning after the implementation.

Only one shipment of coal was made through the port of Rason. Due to the economic crisis in Russia, further plans for the construction and renovation of North Korean infrastructure are yet to be scheduled. Russian companies lack capital to do so. The Russian government finances are allocated to maintaining social stability domestically, integrating Crimea, and most recently to executing the Syrian campaign. Private investment is doubtful as there is no guarantee from Pyongyang. For this reason, it is very difficult to carry out multilateral projects.

Russian activity in North Korea has rather a demonstrative and anti-American nature. This fact could affect the Russian-South Korean relations since South Korea is perceived as a pro-American country. Despite the fact that South Korea has not joined the sanctions regime, the volume of South Korean capital is low.

Hence the conclusion is that projects with North Korea will not be realized, or will be implemented in the minimum scale. In the case of activation of Russian-South Korean cooperation (foreign direct

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7. Ibid.

investment), the new stage of cooperation between Russia and South Korea will begin.

In the article, the Russian policy towards the Korean Peninsula is considered in a historical context.

### **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Policy towards the Korean Peninsula**

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) officially supported the idea of the Korean unification on the conditions of the “Korean Federation” proposed by its official ally North Korea, at that time.<sup>8</sup> Back then, Russia had no political, economic, and cultural ties with South Korea while it was North Korea’s main economic and security partner. As part of the official Soviet policy, North Korea stood on the side of the Soviet security camp while the South was a “U.S. security satellite.”<sup>9</sup>

In reality, the USSR opposed the unification idea because of the following reasons.

Firstly, then-socialist Moscow assumed that the unification would terminate the bilateral military-political alliance with Pyongyang and would render the capitalist expansion on the Korean Peninsula.

Secondly, Moscow calculated that American military bases, stationed in South Korea, will move closer to the Soviet border after the unification.

Thirdly, Soviet leaders believed that it was impossible to unify capitalist and communist systems (actually, they were certain that western capitalism will collapse in the short-term).

Fourthly, there were concerns that the unified Korea could question the status of Russian Far Eastern territories where a lot of Korean

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8. Vasily Mikheev and Alexander Federovskii eds., *Inter-Korean Relations: Political Role of Regional Powers* (Moscow: IMEMO RAN, 2014), p. 31.

9. Vasily Mikheev and Vitaly Shvydko eds., *Problems and Prospects of the Evolution of the Transpacific International Security System* (Moscow: IMEMO RAN, 2014), p. 46.

Russians were residing.

So, while officially backing the principles of Confederation raised by North Korea, the USSR did its best to prevent Korean unification.<sup>10</sup>

The collapse of the USSR changed a negative perception of the Korean unification by post-Soviet Russian political elites.

### ***Russia Policy towards the Korean Peninsula***

Nowadays, Russian approach to the Korean unification has changed to neutrally-positive. It is positive because of following factors.

Firstly, Russian variant of market-democracy reforms makes Russia no more a strategic enemy to the U.S. Even after the Ukrainian crisis, the U.S. and Russia are not enemies any more. Two countries may have different approaches to some international and domestic issues. But they have common interests in global and regional security.

Secondly, the Korean unification will automatically mean the conclusion of the North Korean nuclear issue. It will provide stronger security in Northeast Asia — a vital interest of Russia. To implement the government program, introduced in 2007, aimed at stimulating socio-economic development in the Far East where it has been lagging behind, Russia needs the Far East to remain stable.

Thirdly, the factor of unified Korea will allow implementing such extremely important projects for Russia as the Trans-Korean Railway, Trans-Korean gas pipeline, free port of Vladivostok, etc. Unified Korea will add the Trans-Siberian Railway and Baikal–Amur Mainline the value of which will fall once the Chinese Silk Road economic belt operates in full force. The prospective line of the Silk Road passes through Kazakhstan, connects to the Russian railways near the city of Chelyabinsk, and enters the countries of Eastern Europe after crossing Belarus, formally debilitating the eastern part of the Trans-Siberian Railway in transit trade flows.<sup>11</sup>

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10. Alexei Arbatov, Vladimir Dvorkin, and Sergey Oznobishev eds., *Korean Nuclear Crisis: Prospects of De-escalation* (Moscow: IMEMO RAN, 2013), p. 28.

11. Vasily Mikheev and Vitaly Shvydko eds., *Disbalances of the Transpacific Area* (Moscow: Magister, 2014), p. 125.

Fourth and the main factor, unified Korea is expected to consume much more Russian oil and gas.

Russian approach to the Korean unification is “neutrally” positive because of a few reasons.

Firstly, the problem is that, officially, Russia maintains diplomatic relations with two Korean states — the DPRK and the ROK. In other words, Moscow should diplomatically and formally respect interests of both Pyongyang and Seoul. And, as we know, formally, both Koreas insist on different “unification” formulas.

This puts Russia in an uncomfortable place. Russia should officially agree with the unification formula proposed by both North and South Korea. However, pragmatically, Moscow, on the unofficial level, undoubtedly understands that the only politically-realistic form of the unification is the South Korea’s absorption of the totalitarian North based on free market economy and liberal democracy practiced by the ROK.

Secondly, according to the ROK Constitution, its territorial jurisdiction extends to the whole Korean Peninsula and the North Korean regime is deemed illegitimate. That is, not only politically but also legally, absorption is the only feasible means to the “unification” of Korea. Considering historical trends — the collapse of socialist system in Europe and the German unification —, Russia is well aware that totalitarian socialism existing in North Korea cannot be reformed and integrated into free market economy and democracy, but only be wholly replaced by a new system.

However, diplomatically, Russia cannot support only one side in its attempt to balance between the North and the South. So, Russia avoids discussions on what form of unification is preferred by Russia on the official level.

Thirdly, the Korean issue is not the focus of contemporary Russian foreign policy. Current Russian foreign policy has two main pillars. One is to diplomatically support Russian natural resource and financial sector in global markets. In North Korea, there are neither large gas and oil reserves nor financial markets and privatization programs.

Fourthly, Russia, remembering the experiences of German unifi-

cation and market reforms in Eastern Europe, clearly understands that active support for the Korean unification (absorption) means to invest in restructuring North Korea. Preoccupied with domestic economic and social problems, Russia is not willing to be in the first line of the investors in North Korea's reform.

Fifthly, Russia sees risks in Russia–South Korea economic and financial cooperation once the South pours large sums of money into the North Korean reconstruction. Korean unification means that the already small South Korean investments in Russia will be even less because South Korean capital will be focusing on former North Korea.

Russian positive but neutral approach towards the Korean unification can become more proactive when the real absorption process starts.

### ***Trilateral Cooperation***

In the Soviet period, the idea of trilateral cooperation among the USSR, DPRK and South Korea was set forth by supporters of progress in the Soviet–ROK relations. The idea was to attract South Korea to economic cooperation with Russia and thus to build the economic basis for the future diplomatic relations. For North Korea, a sort of compensation was offered in form of building railroad and pipeline infrastructures and electricity supplies.

At that time, the Soviet Union was Pyongyang's main economic partner and therefore hoped to persuade the latter into the trilateral cooperation.

Today, Russia's motivation is different. Initially, Russian state-run corporations ("Gazprom," "Russian Railroads," and "Rosenergo") saw some economic advantage in the trilateral cooperation idea. But, as Pyongyang rejected market reforms and the situation on the Korean Peninsula aggravated because of the North Korean nuclear program, the practical interest of Russian business in these projects subsided.

Economically, the idea of trilateral projects appears as having no prospects until North Korea undertakes real and positive market transformations. Before that, the projects would be stuck at the stage

of preliminary discussion. Meanwhile, the better North Korean reality is known by Russian businesses, the less enthusiasm the latter has about the long-term capital-intensive cooperation.

Such attitude is reflected, for example, in the Russian “Gazprom” position on the trilateral cooperation. “Gazprom” does not want to undertake the risks incurred in the gas pipeline construction and would prefer to relay those onto the South Korean counterpart, as it has no trust in what Pyongyang guarantees.<sup>12</sup> Seoul’s refusal to undertake the risks is interpreted as “the main reason” for which the Gazprom suspended the project development.

The pragmatic understanding of prospects for the trilateral projects is dictated by the fact that nothing has actually been done during the twenty plus years that passed after the start of the talks on this subject.

The only exception is found in the 50km railroad section between the Russian-North Korean border and the port of Rason — put into operation recently after the over 10-year-long construction. However, this case cannot add arguments in favor of trilateral projects, because:

- first, this relatively short section of the railroad is a bilateral Russian-North Korean project and does not have a direct connection with the trilateral railroad project;
- second, this railroad section was built in the interests of Russian coal companies (especially, “Mechel”) that would like to use the warm-water port of Rason for their coal exports to South Korea, Japan, and other Asian Pacific countries; and
- third, the real tonnage capacity of this section is minimal and this applies not only to the cargo flows but mainly to the capacity of the one-lane railroad bridge connecting Russia and North Korea over the Tumen river.

The regional elites of the Russian Far East stand against the bridge reconstruction as they see it as a threat of influx of North Korean illegal

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12. Vasily Mikheev and Vitaly Shvydko eds., *Problems and Prospects of the Evolution of the Transpacific International Security System*, p. 46.

migrants and trafficking, and do not see any big economic dividends to be brought by the required huge financial costs (probably at the expense of the regional rather than the federal budget).

## **The China Factor**

In cooperation with North Korea, the “Chinese factor” cannot be ignored. China’s new economic policy resulting in “slowdown” of its GDP growth pushes the Chinese capital to look for compensation of domestic “losses” through building up its external activity. This drive is in line with the foreign-policy plan of the PRC leadership intending to consolidate Beijing’s global political and strategic positions through the global expansion of the Chinese capital. China’s foreign policy is becoming ever more strongly aimed at clearing the world markets for the Chinese business both in developed and developing countries.

The major strategic novelty of Xi Jinping’s leadership is seen in the Silk Road economic belt idea, which suggests building of transport corridors from the Pacific Ocean through to the Baltic and Mediterranean Seas as well to the Indian Ocean.

By this design, construction of the Silk Road will enable China to circumvent the differences that took shape within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in relations with Russia regarding the space of Central Asia, and to take the leading positions in relations with the countries of Central Asia and the whole post-Soviet space.

This idea is not counter-posed to Russia or its plans to build the Eurasian Union on the space of the Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS). However, the project can become the first international megaproject of strategic importance under the guidance of China. As far as Russia is concerned, such prospects seem to be of dual nature.

On the one part, Russia can receive economic benefits from modernization of its transport networks at the expense of Chinese capitals. On the other part, should the Silk Road strategy be successful, Russia will find itself in the “follower” position within this long-term project.

China's foreign economic expansion in general and the Silk Road idea in particular would have the following implications for the Russian-Chinese relations along the Korean vector:

- First, North Korea remaining a closed country does not fit with the Chinese Silk Road concept. Meanwhile, South Korea is seen as a most important starting point for realization of the idea to link the Pacific with Europe and other regions. South Korea's involvement in Chinese projects would generate stronger competition between Russia and China for South Korean financial resources.
- Second, the fact that the Silk Road is seen in Russia as a project competitive to the Russian Trans-Siberian Railroads can motivate Russia for further advertising of trans-Korean projects involving Russia, but not China.
- Third, realization of the Silk Road megaproject would exert additional pressure on North Korea. With proper coordination of Russia's and China's policy with the six-party members, this circumstance can be used for positive influence on those forces in North Korean society that potentially would serve to support positive market transformations.

### **Changes in Northeast Asian Security Environment: The Impact of the Ukraine**

North Korea remains to be an impediment to the new security environment in Northeast Asia. Its latest nuclear and missile activities and the threat to conduct another nuclear test provokes growth of tension in the region.

However, the North is not the main risk and not the main impediment nowadays — after the Ukrainian crisis. The worsening of Russia-U.S. relationship turns into the main problem for the regional, as well as global security architecture.

In both the Russian and the Western camps, there are military-oriented politicians and experts, who benefit from the growth of military expenditure. Such people feel comfortable in the old political-ideological paradigm of the Cold War confrontation.

However, some positive balancers exist.

Firstly, China is shifting to a pragmatic and reasonable attitude to North Korea, based not on anti-Americanism but on mutual (with other countries) understanding of the regional military and security threats. So, China turns into a constructive, not destructive element of the Northeast Asian security environment.

Secondly, Northeast Asian countries do not have a very harsh attitude towards the Crimea and Ukraine. Asia-Pacific countries do not see direct security threats in the Ukrainian crisis, with the exception of the incumbent Australian government and, partly, Japan, which promotes its Russian policy under strong American pressure.

Thirdly, the most important “factor of hope” is that Russia and the U.S. have eternal common security interests: nuclear stability and non-proliferation, cooperation in space, anti-terrorism, the removal of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (ISIS), etc. And the North Korean nuclear problem is one of them.

The future of the Northeast Asian security environment will depend upon whether Russia and the U.S. learn how to cooperate in Northeast Asia in the situation when the Ukrainian crisis remains unsolved.

All the participants of the six-party talks have a common interest on the Korean Peninsula, which is the full nuclear disarmament of North Korea.

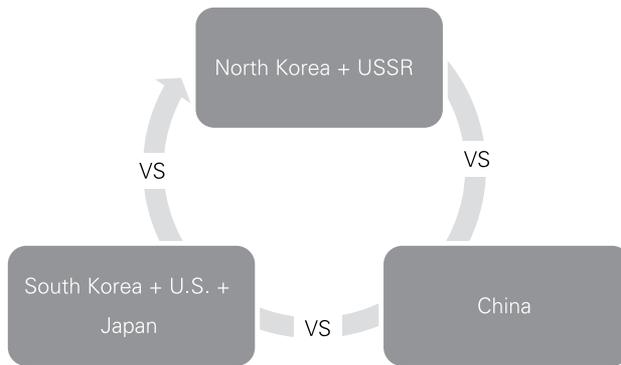
On the other hand, each of the five countries has its own specific interests and nuances in the policy towards Korean Peninsula.

For the U.S., the main and specific interests coincide: that is, nuclear disarmament. Specific interest of Japan is returning of all the Japanese abductees.

The specificity of Russian, Chinese, and South Korean approaches towards Pyongyang is determined by the fact that all these countries share border with North Korea. Complete social and political collapse in the North creates serious risks of mass outflow of North Korean refugees to neighboring countries’ territories. Thus, the main specific interest of the “three neighboring countries” (Russia, China, and South

Korea) is pushing for market reforms in North Korea in order to achieve economic improvement. South Korea has its own great interest, which is the unification of Korean nation.

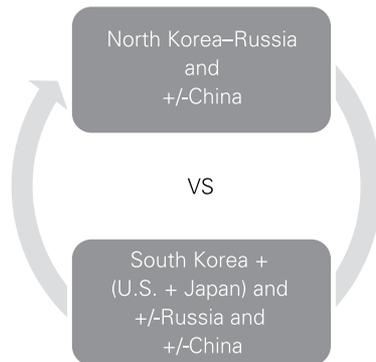
During “Cold War” years, Moscow and Beijing basically sided with each other to confront South Korea, the U.S., and Japan. Nevertheless, confrontation between the former USSR and China undermined North Korea’s position. So, the formula of relations surrounding the Korean Peninsula at that time looked like this:



The turnabout in Russia-China relations over the policy towards the Korean Peninsula came in early 1990s and was caused by the following.

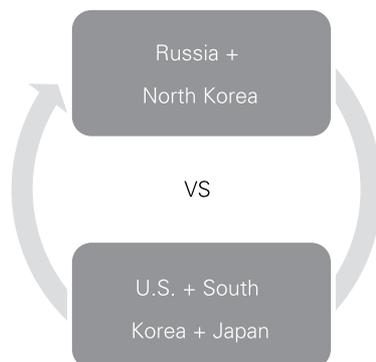
- Soviet political and economic system collapsed,
- China started positive transformation towards market economy,
- South Korea moved towards democracy while North Korea retained its totalitarian system.

As a result, the formula of international relations on the Korean Peninsula changed to:



Such a change made the North Korean regime nervous over its own security and facilitated its initiation of nuclear and missile program.

The Ukrainian crisis gave a birth to a new breed of Russian political thinking towards North Korea. Some experts and politicians in Moscow underline “a common basis of anti-Americanism” in Russian and North Korean security interests. Both countries are under Western sanctions. This, as they think, could be a new ground for Russia–North Korea cooperation under the new Russian strategy of turning to the East. Turning only to China is not enough, so some political circles in Russia look for additional partners in the situation of Russia–U.S. confrontation because of Ukraine. If this works out, we could see a comeback to the old scheme:



However, such a scenario seems unrealistic.

Firstly, Russia continues to follow strongly its non-proliferation commitments.

Secondly, any economic assistance to North Korea will not work efficiently until the real market reforms and openness in North Korea. Russian private sector will not risk with uncertainties in the North Korean economy.

Thirdly, Russia government is pre-occupied with the Crimea, East Ukraine, Syria and dire social and economic situation in Russia. It does not have spare financial resources to help the North.

Fourthly, the character of sanctions against Russia (the Ukraine) and the North (the nuclear and missile tests — supported by Russia as well) are different in nature.

Finally, but very importantly, the situation cannot return to the Cold War times due to China, which considers the North not as an ally but as a troublemaker that imposes nuclear risks on China's security.

## **Korean Unification: The Role of Russia**

Russia can play its positive role in the process of the Korean unification at all stages:

- the stage of North Korean involvement in reforms;
- the stage of North Korean adaptation to market principles;
- the first stage of the unified Korea's development.

At the same time, Russia's role will not be the main and leading one. Here, South Korea and China will assume the primary role.

At this point, it is important to understand what Russia can do and what cannot be expected of it. Here, delusions within Russian diplomatic and expert community are in overabundance.

The first delusion is that Russia currently has to "reserve" its positions on North Korea to cope with China's influence. It has pre-determined recent ideas about launching a pipeline via North Korea,

a railway construction, etc.

Such diplomatic logic roots in the Cold War period, when Moscow's diplomacy was oriented towards the containment of an adversary and strengthening its own positions. Currently, in the era of globalization, countries are partners and competitors but not adversaries. The very nature of globalization means placing an increased number of international problems at the global level and objectively strengthens the cooperative rather than confrontational development paradigm.

The reason why the old way of thinking has not changed with regard to North Korea is that Russian businesses — and consequently, Russian *Realpolitik* — do not have interest in devastated, and politically unstable North Korea with insufficient oil and gas resources.

The fact that Russian diplomacy clings to the old thinking in relations with the DPRK and at the same time, to the new thinking in relations with ROK creates a duality of Russia's policy towards the peninsula: an attempt to flirt with the North and simultaneously create a new type of strategic partnership with the South.

The second delusion is the idea of a gas pipeline. Its realization is possible only after the two Koreas are unified on market-democratic principles. After the unification, the construction of a pipeline via the Korean Peninsula, as well as the realization of other projects currently belonging to trilateral cooperation, will become Russia's substantial and real contribution to the unification of Korea and define Russian role in this process.

In case the present North Korean regime stays in power, this project cannot be realized for a number of security, political, economic and financial reasons:

- the persistence of military and nuclear threat from the North creates insurmountable security risks to the project;
- the preservation of the current North Korean regime, whose key factor of survival is a policy of nuclear blackmail, creates a risk of manipulating Russia's gas supplies to South Korea;
- the absence of market economy in North Korea creates economic and financial risks of investment non-return and the lack of compen-

sation for possible losses in case problems between the supplier and the transit party arise since there are no mechanisms of dispute resolution in North Korea generally accepted by the current global economic practice.

- the mountainous landscape increases costs for the pipeline construction. A financial effectiveness of the pipeline comparing to that of LNG deliveries is not evident.

The third delusion is a reconstruction of 70 industrial enterprises established in North Korea with Soviet assistance.

Mostly, these enterprises are not only physically decrepit but also morally and technologically outdated. The unified Korea will have to create a new innovative, industrial and infrastructural basis in the North — the policy the unified Germany pursued towards the economy of East Germany — the most developed economy of the socialist block in innovative terms.

Another illusion is assumptions that Russia, motivated by economic and political reasons, will make a financial contribution to the reconstruction of the North.

In practical terms, Russian assistance to North Korea will be limited by its obligations within the six-party talks and UN humanitarian mission.

Russia's participation in the pipeline construction and the implementation of other projects, regardless of whether two Korean states with free market co-exist or Korean unification is achieved, will be probably implemented in accordance with the following pattern: South Korea's (or unified Korea's) provides finances to the North, followed by a subsequent purchase of Russian resources by this fund.

At the current stage, Russia's role in the Korean unification is primarily of a politically-consultative nature:

- To Russia's interest, a market-democratic way of Korean unification is advantageous.
- Russia can participate in the realization of Korean unification by means of (1) political support and (2) consultative assistance based on its experience in marketization of militarized socialist economy.

## Unification Prospects

The current phase of North Korea's development is the last phase in the existence of the North Korean totalitarian regime. The North Korean economy and political systems have undergone the profound structural crisis.

The command-distribution economic model with the priority of military construction does not work and cannot provide the population with foods and daily consumption commodities.

The absence of the domestic market of production and consumption plus the self-isolation of North Korea produce the growing social tensions.

Following Kim Jong-un's advent to power, the totalitarian political system started to fade away. Notwithstanding his broad authority, Kim Jong-un does not possess such absolute power and political charisma as Kim Jong-il did. In such circumstances, the power struggle of clans "under" Kim Jong-un is growing. Cherished by some foreign researchers, the hopes that the new North Korean leader would start the reforms himself turned out futile.

As evidenced by the most recent nuclear-missile tests, the Pyongyang regime does not intend to take the road of market reforms and openness as it sees the latter as a threat to its power. In order to survive, it is applying Kim Jong-il's usual tactics of nuclear blackmail.

Pyongyang's calculation is to receive tangible foreign aid in exchange for its regularly given promises to freeze (but not to stop irreversibly) nuclear tests. However, the pattern of "nuclear promises for money" stopped working under the recent administrations of the U.S. and South Korea that demand Pyongyang's concrete actions rather than mere promises in the field of nuclear disarmament.

In 2013, the position of the North Korean regime was weakened rapidly by the change in China's position. After the last nuclear test in North Korea, the new Chinese leadership tightened its approach to Pyongyang (blocked North Korean accounts in Chinese banks, reduced aid, fortified the frontier, etc.).<sup>13</sup> The arguments of Pyongyang stating that North Korea is a "buffer" providing the military and

political protection to China against the U.S. (like the arguments of Kiev stating that Ukraine is a “buffer” providing the military and political protection to Europe/“civilized world” against Russia) are no longer effective. Moreover, Beijing sees the North Korean policy of confrontation as a pretext being used by the anti-China forces in the U.S. for building-up the U.S. military presence in Asia-Pacific counter to China’s interests.

In 2013, the new North Korean leadership made a serious miscalculation in the conduct of its usual nuclear-blackmail policy. In the past, Kim Jong-il managed to pump up the situation to the almost ultimate level and then began talks with the U.S. and South Korea to “entertain” all actors in the six-party process. In 2013, however, Kim Jong-un crossed the line: the situation was heated to the maximum (through the calls on all foreigners to leave not only Pyongyang but Seoul as well). In such a situation, Pyongyang’s next move could be nothing else but a start of hostilities, from which the North Korean regime refrained, as its rapid defeat in the war was largely realistic.

As a result, Pyongyang’s actions of the early 2013 scared nobody, and the North Korean regime lost its major trump-card of fanning-up the situation and receiving money in exchange for talks. North Korea’s usual policy got stuck in the blind alley and this fact aggravates disagreements within the North Korean elite.

The North Korean societal model exhausted all historical resources for development and will not be able to provide sustainable viability of the political regime in the mid-term future.

In such conditions, the political collapse can take place in the North anytime, if a powerful political “trigger” comes into action. The similar situation was observed in the former Soviet Union when the putsch of August 1991 functioned as such a trigger.

So far, it is not clear as to what would serve as a political “trigger” for the collapse of the North Korean regime and when this might

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13. Vasily Mikheev, Sergey Lukonin, and Jeh Sung Hoon, “Multivariance: Xi Jinping’s Big Strategic Answer” (in Russian), *Mirovaya ekonomika I mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya* 59 (World economy and international relations), no. 12 (2015), p. 7.

occur. However, the probability for the avalanche-like course of events is growing.

Such prospects make all countries including Russia, concerned with the events on the Korean Peninsula be prepared for the historic changes in North Korea — the regime replacement, economic reforms, initiation of the open-door policy, and an outcome of the positive changes — for the process of Korean unification that would follow the collapse of the North Korean regime and take place on the market-democracy basis of South Korea.

Another probable scenario is that the two Koreas would coexist for a certain period of time while the North would be learning “to catch fish in the market economy.”

## **Conclusion**

In general, the Russian policy towards the Korean Peninsula (the unification of Korea under the terms of the absorption of North Korea by South Korea) has been changed compared with the policy pursued by the Soviet Union and now is neutral-positive.

The Ukrainian crisis could have an impact on cooperation with South Korea in terms of Russia’s efforts to build a constructive relationship with all stakeholders.

At the same time, cooperation with North Korea will carry a symbolic and demonstrative nature. Here, the main goal is to demonstrate that the EU and the U.S. attempt to isolate Russia failed.

Russian-North Korean projects will not be carried out or, even if it is, the extent of their implementation will be minimal. Russian business will not take an active part in the construction/modernization of infrastructure in North Korea, as it suffers from a lack of capital for development programs, even in Russia.

Implementation of tripartite projects is also doubtful from the Russian side for the reasons mentioned above. Their implementation is more likely at the cost of South Korea or China.

Theoretically, implementation of the Chinese concept of the Silk

Road economic belt can help strengthen cooperation between North Korea and Russia in terms of the construction of transport routes, however, this scenario will not be implemented because it is not economically efficient.

Russia will not conduct an “ideological policy of friendship” to support North Korea with tangible resources and capital, because the basic resources are spent on the maintenance of social stability in the country, integration and re-innovation of Crimea, problem of East of Ukraine, and most recently in the Syrian campaign.

At the same time, the need to balance with China’s growing dependence, the factor of the Silk Road, and the sanctions regime will enhance cooperation between Russia and South Korea. It is important not to miss a historic opportunity to build a strategic partnership with South Korea.

In modern conditions, the North Korean regime is not able to modernize itself and will stagnate with a gradual destruction in the short and medium term. In this form of self-isolation, it is not able to create legal and economic conditions for the development of the capitalist type of economy. Black and gray economy will grow, which will eventually lead to the collapse of the regime.

In these circumstances, it is advisable to continue and develop the policy of engagement:

- continue and develop cultural exchanges;
- encourage an increase in the number of mobile phones in North Korea that can connect to the Internet and play video (assuming the satellite signal coverage in North Korea);
- organize inter-Korean and multilateral sport games, competitions, cultural events, etc.;
- establish a cooperation program with North Korean kindergartens and schools, with a focus on educational cooperation;
- to establish an Korea Unification Fund with a focus on the financing of the integration of North Korea into South Korea’s economy;
- develop a plan for long-term projects (strategic plans of megaprojects) that will be implemented by South Korean companies in North Korea after the unification;
- develop a humanitarian program for North Korea in the event of an

- unexpected collapse of the regime;
- develop a program of social and economic reforms, in the case of the collapse of the regime;
- cooperate with North Korea. This should be pursued based on the policy of “concession after concession,” bilateral business projects should be carried out only when the project entails genuine efficiency and profitability.

In general, Russia is interested in the unification of Korea under the terms of the South, and will not oppose this process of absorption. However, Russia will not be able to play, in this process, the leading role for the objective reasons.

However, the solution of the Korean Peninsula problem opens up good prospects for cooperation between Russia, South Korea, China, the U.S., and Japan in terms of security cooperation and the establishment of a new type of relations in Northeast Asia, and it's very unprofessional not to take the advantage of this chance (even ignoring the opinion of North Korea).

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## **Ukrainian-Russian Conflict and Its Implications for Northeast Asia\***

**Olexiy Haran**

In 2014, the crisis over Ukraine became the most serious European crisis since the end of the Cold War. Russia's intervention in Crimea and Donbas was open violation of security assurances given by great powers to denuclearized Ukraine. It undermined credibility of great powers and created dangerous precedents for South Korea, Japan, and other U.S. allies in Asia. It increased tension in East and South China Seas as well as in the Korean Peninsula, making Pyongyang rely more on nuclear weapons.

Trying to avoid Western sanctions and isolation, Russia moved closer to China. But this rapprochement and opening of Asian markets to Russia have limitations due to security concerns of U.S. allies and present sanctions. Annexation of Crimea and Russia's drift to China increase the role of U.S. commitment to its allies. Western sectoral sanctions should be preserved until Minsk-2 agreement is fulfilled and Russian regular troops and "volunteers" leave Ukraine.

**Keywords:** annexation of Crimea, nuclear guarantees, Ukraine-Russia conflict, Western sanctions, relations in Northeast Asia

### **Introduction**

In 2014, the crisis over Ukraine became the most serious European crisis since the end of the Cold War. According to the 1994 Budapest memorandum, Kyiv gave up its nuclear arsenal (then third largest in the world) in exchange for "security assurances" (but not "security guarantees") of territorial integrity from the U.S., the UK, and Russia

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\* The author would like to thank Ambassador Mykola Kulynych, Daisuke Kitade, Nicu Popescu, Stanislav Secieru, and Andreas Umland for their materials and advices in preparing this article as well as his frequent co-author Petro Burkovsky.

(France and China issued relevant statements). The parties agreed to respect Ukraine's borders, to abstain from the use or threat of force against Ukraine, to support Ukraine where an attempt is made to place pressure on it by economic coercion and to bring any incident of aggression by a nuclear power before the UN Security Council.<sup>1</sup> However, in March 2014, Russia annexed Crimea in violation of both the Budapest memorandum and the 1997 Russian-Ukrainian treaty which recognized the inviolability of borders, and then started intervening in Donbas, the east of Ukraine. Change of borders by force in Europe created a dangerous precedent for the whole international system, including Northeast Asia, and led to Western sanctions against Russia.

In this article, we begin with brief analyses on how post-Soviet space started to disintegrate geopolitically since 1991. While maintaining "multi-vector" approach, Kyiv gradually drifted to Europe. Moreover, Ukrainian political system appeared to be more balanced than the Russian one which created opportunities for democratic opposition.

Then we discuss *Euromaidan* which started as a protest against Ukrainian president Yanukovich's abrupt decision, under Russian pressure, not to sign the association agreement with the EU. It quickly transformed into a protest against the corrupt authoritarian president. Ouster of Yanukovich ended the domestic "Ukraine crisis." Instead, with Moscow's military intervention Russia started undeclared "hybrid war" against Ukraine. The West responded with economic sanctions on Russia.

In the final section, we analyze the influence of the crisis on Northeast Asia, namely China, Japan, and two Koreas. It increased tension in East and South China Seas as well as in the Korean Peninsula making Pyongyang rely more on nuclear weapons and the U.S. allies seek additional guarantees from Washington.

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1. UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, "Memorandum on Security Assurances in connection with Ukraine's Accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," December 19, 1994, A/49/765 and S/1994/1399.

## **Former “Brothers” Moving in Different Directions**

Even under the authoritarian-inclined presidents Leonid Kuchma and Viktor Yanukovich, Kyiv resisted scenarios that would strengthen Russia-led supranational institutions in the post-Soviet space. Since the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Moscow and Kyiv held opposite views of its future — “reintegration” and “civilized divorce” respectively. Ukraine has not signed the CIS Charter. Therefore, despite being one of the founding countries, Ukraine formally is not a member of the CIS. Kyiv refused to sign the 1992 Tashkent Treaty on Collective Security.

After Vladimir Putin came to power in Russia in 1999, there was euphoria in Western countries, caused by his declarations of rapprochement with the West: almost nobody paid adequate attention to the restoration of the Soviet anthem which revealed Putin’s nostalgia for Soviet superpower.

In 2000, within the CIS, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan formed the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC). Ukraine decided only to have observer status in EurAsEC (the same did Moldova and Armenia). Instead, Kyiv underlined the development of bilateral relations within the CIS and ratification by Russia of the 1994 CIS free trade agreement (it was only done in 2012 when the new agreement was signed). The 1993 free trade agreement (FTA) between Ukraine and Russia actually was nullified through numerous exemptions introduced by Moscow.

In reality, twenty-five years of the CIS existence were marked by reorientation toward other geopolitical players. Throughout 2000s, the export within CIS countries was about only 16-19 percent of the total CIS export. Import from the CIS countries decreased from 46 percent in 2000 to 22 percent in 2014.<sup>2</sup>

Kyiv has followed a “multi-vector” foreign policy. In 1997, Ukraine

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2. Interstate Statistical Committee of the CIS, “Share of the CIS and Other Countries in Total Export/Import of Individual CIS Countries,” last modified March 3, 2015, <http://www.cisstat.com/eng/>.

signed both the Charter with NATO on Distinctive Partnership and the basic treaty with Russia which recognized territorial borders. Under President Kuchma, in the wake of Russia's rapprochement with the West after 9/11, Ukrainian parliament adopted in 2003 the law on the principles of national security, which stipulates Ukraine's membership in the NATO and the EU as strategic goals.

Yet, before the 2004 Orange Revolution, the post-Soviet space was viewed by many policy-makers as a sphere of Russian influence. The Orange Revolution was described by Kremlin as "the Western plot." However, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians in freezing temperatures at Maidan — Kyiv's central square prevented President Kuchma from bringing his chosen successor (Yanukovych) to office through falsified elections and thus, repeating the "Yeltsin-Putin scenario." The revolution was non-violent, marked by inter-ethnic and inter-confessional tolerance.

The main accomplishments of the Orange Revolution were political freedom and free and fair elections. Ukraine was recognized in the ratings of Freedom House as the only "free country" in the CIS space.<sup>3</sup>

The Orange Revolution ended in compromise, and the 2004 constitutional reform created a new design according to European practice: the prime minister would rely on a parliamentary majority and the president could not remove him/her, unlike before. The flip side of compromises (especially shadow deals within elites) in Ukraine is that they cause gridlock. Contrary to Georgia, the struggle against corruption never started. Neither did judicial reform.

The paradox was that Yanukovych benefitted from democratic freedom by exploiting the populist opposition niche. After he won the presidential election in February 2010, the Constitutional Court appeared under pressure from the new president: in September 2010, it restored the 1996 version of the Constitution, thereby, giving Yanukovych all the authorities Kuchma had. And in reality, even

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3. Freedom House, "Ukraine," *Freedom in the World 2006*, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2006/ukraine>.

more. Ukraine returned to “partly free” according to Freedom House report.<sup>4</sup>

In the wake of mounting Russian pressure, Yanukovych made a huge geo-strategic concession. In April 2010, Moscow agreed to decrease the price of gas sold to Ukraine by one-third in exchange for leasing the Russian naval base in Sevastopol, Crimea, for another 25 years (after the present agreement expires in 2017) and for additional five-year terms thereafter.<sup>5</sup> In July 2010, the Ukrainian parliament removed NATO membership as the strategic goal and declared “non-bloc” status for Ukraine (while keeping the EU membership as a priority).

However, these concessions did not meet Moscow’s expectations, while Kyiv was disappointed with the lack of reciprocity in the economic, especially energy, spheres.

Kyiv did not abandon plans to sign the association agreement (AA) with the EU which includes a deep and comprehensive free trade area (DCFTA) and to introduce a visa-free regime. The text of AA was initialed in March 2012. Immediately, Moscow declared that if Ukraine joins the Customs Union, it would be given more preferential treatment. However, the Customs Union and DCFTA are not compatible, so Yanukovych declared that cooperation with the Customs Union would be limited to the formula “3+1” (without membership status in the Customs Union). Therefore, in the summer of 2013, Moscow started economic and psychological warfare against Yanukovych to prevent signing of AA planned for November 2013. The ominous sign came in early September 2013 when Armenia, which planned to initial AA with the EU, suddenly declared under Russian pressure that country would join the Customs Union.

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4. Freedom House, “Ukraine,” *Freedom in the World 2011*, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2011/ukraine>.

5. According to the 1996 Ukrainian Constitution, there should be no foreign bases on Ukrainian soil. Because of Sevastopol base, “transitional clauses” of the Constitution contained the special article on “temporary” foreign bases.

## **Euromaidan, Russian Intervention and Western Sanctions**

When President Yanukovych abruptly resisted signing the long-promised AA with the EU, mass protests started in Maidan, symbolically on the same date as the 2004 Orange Revolution. Events in the severe winter of 2013/2014 became known as Euromaidan, Maidan-2 or “Revolution of Dignity.” They were non-violent for more than two and half months. When Yanukovych responded with violence, Euromaidan quickly moved beyond its initial slogans and demanded the president’s resignation.

In February 2014, after security forces started to shoot protesters, Ukraine became, perhaps, the only country where in the center of a capital people died under the EU flags. In this context, according to the agreement signed on February 21, 2014 between the opposition and Yanukovych (with Western intermediaries; Russia participated as well but in the end decided not to sign), the parliament reinstated the 2004 constitutional reform which was among the main demands of Euromaidan. Yanukovych (not the opposition) violated this agreement: he did not sign the parliamentary decision and fled to Russia.<sup>6</sup> And the West started sanctions against Yanukovych and his entourage *only after* he had left the country.

The new cabinet was formed according to the constitutional procedure and the early presidential elections were scheduled by the parliament for May 2014 (recognized internationally as free and fair). In the same way as after the Orange Revolution, regional authorities in Crimea and Donetsk appointed under Yanukovych quickly recognized the new regime in Kyiv.

Russian President Vladimir Putin decided to intervene. He considered: 1) playing on Russian messianism and increasing his personal ratings quickly in times of growing problems in Russia’s economy; 2) effective and sustainable Ukrainian democracy represents threat to

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6. For good account on Euromaidan and the beginning of Russian intervention, see Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis. What It Means for the West* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014).

authoritarian Putin regime; 3) as in 2004, he could not understand that people protested spontaneously and considered Euromaidan to be part of “Western threat” to Russia; 4) psychologically he wanted to punish Ukrainians who twice, in 2004 and 2014, destroyed his plans when it seemed that Ukraine had already returned under Moscow’s control.

The annexation of Crimea was convenient to achieve for Russia’s strategic point as it was the only autonomous region in Ukraine and the only one where Russians comprise the majority of the population (58%).<sup>7</sup> The plan was prepared before the victory of Euromaidan (on the Russian medal “For return of Crimea,” February 20 was inscribed as the starting date of operation, when Yanukovich was still in Kyiv as Ukrainian president). Russian soldiers without insignia moved from the base in Sevastopol to other strategic points in Crimea. Putin denied the involvement of Russian soldiers, but acknowledged it in a documentary which aired on Russian TV a year later.<sup>8</sup> Under armed occupation, the pseudo-referendum was held on March 16, 2014, in contradiction to all Ukrainian laws and international procedures.

It was a clear violation of the 1994 Budapest memorandum and the 1997 Ukrainian-Russian treaty. It raised doubts in the credibility of “security assurances” provided by great powers, especially for those countries which were deciding whether to adhere to nuclear non-proliferation.

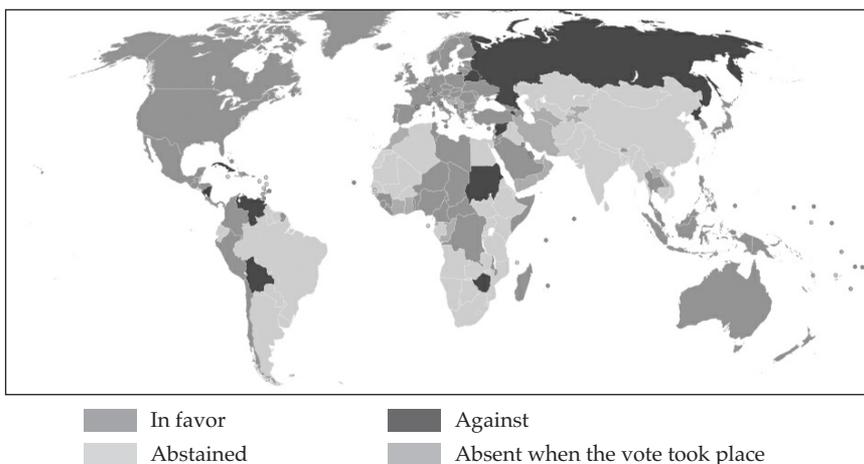
It became the first case of an annexation in Europe (neither Kosovo nor Northern Cyprus was the case) since the end of World War II. Many commentators compared it to the 1938 German *Anschluss* of Austria and Sudetenland or the 1990 Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. On March 27, 2014, the UN Assembly General resolution on territorial integrity of Ukraine was supported by 100 countries (including South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore,

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7. Ukraine, State Statistic Committee, “All-Ukrainian Population Census 2001,” modified date unknown, <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/>.

8. “Vladimir Putin: The Russian Federation Sent to Crimea Detachments of Military Intelligence Directorate and Marines to Disarm Ukrainian Military” (in Russian), *Russia Today*, March 15, 2015.

Figure 1. Results of the UN General Assembly vote about the Territorial Integrity of Ukraine



Source: "United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/262," *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Nations\\_General\\_Assembly\\_Resolution\\_68/262](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_General_Assembly_Resolution_68/262) (accessed September 27, 2015).

and Bhutan), with only 11 — against (Russia, North Korea, Sudan, Syria, Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Zimbabwe, Venezuela, Armenia, and Belarus).

Finally, Moscow has not taken into account Crimean Tatars, Sunni Muslim minority and the real natives of Crimea, who boycotted the "referendum" (they comprise 12% of Crimea's population). Crimean Tatars, deported from Crimea by Stalin in 1944, were not allowed to come back until 1990. After the annexation in 2014, leaders of Crimean Tatars are not allowed to return to Crimea once again. Among them is Mustafa Cemilev, who spent 15 years in Soviet prisons and then was head of *Mejlis*, Crimean Tatar self-government, for 25 years.

There was hope that nations which fought for independence could understand Ukraine's struggle against terrorism, armed separatism supported from outside, and direct foreign aggression. But India, China, Vietnam, Pakistan, and Afghanistan were among 58 countries abstained and 24 countries were absent. Many Third World countries wrongly viewed annexation of Crimea in terms of the Cold War

between enlarged NATO and Russia and were afraid more of “Western domination” than their own problems with separatism. In some cases, given the huge Russian pressure on Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries, their decision not to vote “against” one may interpret as a sign of disagreement with Russia.

In the absence of sanctions from UN Security Council because of Russia’s veto power, the key principle for introducing sanctions was the common approach from the U.S., other members of G7, and the EU. Their first reaction was to cancel the G8 Summit in Sochi, to freeze Russia’s participation in G8, and to suspend the EU talks with Russia on visa issues and on new EU-Russia agreement. After “referendum” in Crimea, Western countries introduced visa bans for individuals and froze assets of individuals and legal entities involved in annexation. Then the ban was imposed on import from Crimea, investment into Crimea, and export of certain goods and technology, which concern the transport, telecommunications and energy sectors. On April 10, 2014, Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe suspended voting rights of Russian delegation and its representation in institution’s leading bodies (valid at least until January 2016).

Yet, this response looked weak for Putin and he decided to repeat “Crimean scenario” in other Ukrainian southern and eastern regions. Russian infiltration in Donbas started in April 2014.<sup>9</sup> However, Putin’s view that Ukrainians and Russians are “one nation, one ethnos”<sup>10</sup> was a huge mistake. Therefore, his plans to either control all of Ukraine or at least to split it have failed. The contemporary Ukrainian state proclaimed in 1991 is based more on the territorial, “inclusive” nationalism

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9. See, Gen. Philip Breedlove, NATO Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, “Who Are the Men Behind the Masks?” (NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe Blog, April 17, 2014), <http://aco.nato.int/saceur2013/blog/who-are-the-men-behind-the-masks.aspx>; “Nemtsov’s Report on Putin’s War in Ukraine,” *European Union Foreign Affairs Journal*, Special Edition (May 2015), pp. 5-52, <http://www.libertas-institut.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/EUFAJ-Special-NemtsovReport-150521.pdf>.

10. “Vladimir Putin: Russians and Ukrainians Are One People” (in Russian), *Russia Today*, June 19, 2015.

than on ethnicity. Ukraine, compared to Balkan Peninsula, Caucasus, and Russia, avoided ethnic conflicts until 2014. The paradox is that despite the war in Donbas, Putin's aggression actually cemented Ukrainian political identity.<sup>11</sup>

The poll conducted by the respectable Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in April 2014 confirmed that separatism did not have support from the south and east of the country with the exception of Donbas, but even there its supporters were in minority. The same was true about Moscow's plans for "federalization" of Ukraine which was a tool to follow Crimean "example." Even in Donbas, polls confirmed that the majority favored decentralization, but not federalization.<sup>12</sup>

The map below clearly shows that it was not a civil war, and by August 2014, pro-Russian fighters were on the verge of collapse. They were saved only by the invasion of regular Russian troops which was part of Moscow's undeclared "hybrid" war against Ukraine. However, even after that, the occupied areas of Donbas comprise only 3 percent of the Ukrainian territory.

Russia followed the same path as it did previously in Moldova and Georgia: war, separatism, economic destabilization, and attempts to create social unrests which, from Moscow's point of views, would lead to regime change and blockade of implementations of AA with the EU.<sup>13</sup>

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11. Russian-speakers and locals from Donbas comprise substantial part of the Army and volunteer battalions fighting in Donbas for integrity of Ukraine. Contrary to some claims in the West on the threat of the far right in Ukraine, in the 2014 parliamentary elections *The Right Sector* (which resorted to violence during Euromaidan) secured only 2% of the votes (just compare to 25% of the *National Front* in France in the 2014 elections to the European Parliament). The far right elected only 2 MPs out of 450. The nationalist center-right *Svoboda* also did not overcome the barrier.
  12. Inna Vedernikova, Yulia Mostovaya, and Sergei Rakhmanin, "South-East: The Branch of Our Tree" (in Russian), *Zerkalo Nedeli*, April 19, 2014, p. 6.
  13. "Could you imagine China attacking Vietnam because it signed Trans-Pacific Partnership in October 2015?" rhetorically asked Kataryna Wolczuk, Deputy Director, Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of

Figure 2. The Area Controlled by Russia's Proxies by August 24, 2014 (in dark)  
(The territory of annexed Crimea is hatched)



Source: Dmytro Vortman based on the map from *Radio Liberty*, <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/media/photogallery/26547529.html>.

Putin's aggression contributed to a dramatic shift in the Ukrainian society. Previously, in Ukraine, supporters of NATO membership were always a minority but now Ukrainians, in potential referendum, would say "yes" to NATO.<sup>14</sup> As the non-bloc status introduced under Yanukovych did not prevent Ukraine from Russian aggression, it has been cancelled by the new parliament in December 2014.

At the same time, there is an understanding among Ukrainian politicians and experts that NATO and the EU membership are not on the agenda right now. The stress is now on implementing the AA

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Birmingham (conference "EU Eastern Policy: Shaping Relations with Russia and Ukraine," Bratislava, November 3, 2015).

14. Democratic Initiatives Foundation, "Support for Joining NATO Considerably Increases in Ukraine — Poll," August 3, 2015, [http://dif.org.ua/en/mass\\_media/support-for-joining-n.htm](http://dif.org.ua/en/mass_media/support-for-joining-n.htm).

with the EU, signed and ratified after Euromaidan, which provides a roadmap for reforms. In an attempt to find compromise with Russia, the implementation of DCFTA was postponed until January 1, 2016 (yet, Russia continues declaring that if it comes into force, it will impose trade restrictions on Ukraine, despite the existing FTA within the CIS).

Russia's military infiltration in Donbas and deaths of three hundred civilians on Malaysian MH17 flight shot down on July 17, 2014 in the separatist-controlled area led to West's sectoral sanctions, designed to hit financial, energy and military sectors of Russia. It included nine major banks (for example, USD 572 million of the assets of Bank Rossiya were frozen in the U.S.); energy companies Rosneft, Transneft, Gazpromneft, and Novatek; three major Russian defense companies. Export licenses are prohibited for deep water oil and arctic oil exploration and production, and shale oil projects in Russia.<sup>15</sup>

The EU and the U.S. sanctions were joined by Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, and Switzerland, although to a different extent. Gas production and delivery were not directly restricted by the EU (as the EU imports one-third of its consumed gas from Russia), but the U.S. sanctioned Gazprom.<sup>16</sup>

While Poland, Romania, Sweden, Denmark, and the Baltic States demanded strong reaction, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Austria, Greece, Cyprus, and Luxembourg were against restrictions due to strong trade, financial and energy ties, and the southern Portugal, Spain, and Italy did not consider security threat from Russia to be serious.<sup>17</sup> There were strong business lobbyists in Germany and France who were against sanctions. But the leaders of France, Germany, and Great Britain decided to go ahead (evolution of German Chancellor

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15. Stanislav Secrieru, *Russia under Sanctions: Assessing Damages, Scrutinizing Adaptation & Evasion* (Warsaw: Polish Institute of International Relations, November 2015), p. 25.

16. Jarosław Ćwiek-Karpowicz, Stanislav Secrieru eds., *Sanctions and Russia* (Warsaw: Polish Institute of International Relations, 2015), pp.33, 39-42, [http://www.pism.pl/files/?id\\_plik=19045](http://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=19045).

17. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Angela Merkel who previously had friendly relations with Putin was especially remarkable). France cancelled the delivery of two Mistral aircraft carriers to Russia. Instead, the EU leaders, first of all Merkel, pressed U.S. President Barack Obama to use sanctions instead of providing lethal defensive weapons to Ukraine (although bipartisan support for that emerged in the U.S. Congress).

The Western sanctions can be called off when Russian aggression stops (the “Crimean part” would continue to work unless Crimea returns to Ukraine). However, Moscow not only views sanctions as part of regime change in Russia but uses it as a pretext for further authoritarian consolidation and for intensification of its anti-Western rhetoric.

In August 2014, Russia in reaction to Western sanctions introduced an embargo on certain EU agricultural products (social networks are full of videos showing Russian tractors destroying tons of food). However, by August 2015, the EU agro-exports grew by 5 percent due to flexibility of farmers (+15% to U.S., +30.8% to South Korea, +21.7% to Egypt) and EU’s Commission assistance to lift trade barriers (China, Canada, and Japan).<sup>18</sup>

Expanded sanctions aggravated Russia’s economic problems. The capital outflow reached USD 154 billion in 2014, up from USD 63 billion in 2013. From August 2014 when first financial sanctions were introduced, till June 2015, Russia’s international reserves shrank by USD 107 billion. On “Black Tuesday,” December 16, 2014, ruble depreciated by 20 percent and by June 2015, official exchange rate dollar/ruble increased by 1.5 times.<sup>19</sup>

Facing increase of sanctions and trying to split the Western allies, Moscow has agreed with negotiations. But the format of consultations between the U.S., the UK, Ukraine and Russia provided by the Budapest memorandum did not work. In April 2014, there were talks in “Geneva format” (Ukraine, Russia, the U.S., and the EU) which

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18. Stanislav Secrieru, *Russia under Sanctions*, p. 60.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-34. Exchange rates are taken from Russia’s Central Bank statistics, <http://www.cbr.ru/>.

outlined the principles of solving the crisis. However, then the initiative was taken by Germany and France in co-organizing with Ukraine and Russia the so-called “Normandy format.” Given Obama’s indecisiveness, the U.S. formally stepped aside, although Washington has been consulted and has supported decisions of “Normandy four.”

In September 2014 and in February 2015 after negotiations by “Normandy four,” two Minsk Trilateral Agreements were signed by Ukraine, Russia, and the OSCE,<sup>20</sup> supported by the U.S. and UN Security Council. The Agreements, though in a contradictory and complicated way, outlined the ceasefire, exchange of prisoners, withdrawal of foreign troops and illegal military formations from Ukraine, and Ukraine’s control over border with Russia.

The new major offensive is too risky for Russia. Therefore, Moscow might try to exhaust Ukraine through endless separatist shelling (only in September 2015, it seems that the ceasefire started to be implemented). But in this case, sanctions will remain as well. It will continue to not only ruin Russia’s economy but also exacerbate unfavorable comparison of situation in the “people’s republics” and Ukraine-controlled territories.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, Moscow may decide to use another plan: “Bosnianization” of Ukraine. It would exceed the scope of “Finlandization” Kremlin was in favor of. To achieve it, Moscow may use Clause 11 with additional notes imposed on Kyiv by Minsk-2 accords. In contrast to the Ukrainian Constitution, it demands more power to the separatist-held areas in Donbas while formally keeping them inside the Ukrainian state and making Kyiv and the West pay for the reconstruction of the destroyed Donbas economy.<sup>22</sup>

Trying to avoid new war, the Western partners pressed Ukraine

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20. Leaders of separatists signed it as well, but neither their position, nor “people’s republics” were mentioned, only names. See, “Minsk Ceasefire Deal: Full Text,” *International Business Times*, February 12, 2015.

21. For more on that see, Olexiy Haran and Petro Burkovsky, “From ‘Hybrid War’ to ‘Hybrid Peace’. One More ‘Frozen Conflict?’” *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo*, no. 369 (July 2015), <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/node/7811>.

22. Ibid.

to implement Clause 11, ahead of implementing ceasefire and clauses 1 to 10.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, in the eyes of Ukrainians, it looks like “appeasing” Russia. Kyiv stresses that it can have dialogue only with those representatives of the occupied areas who are legitimately elected, that is, according to Clause 9, under Ukrainian laws and OSCE monitoring. Kyiv also demands withdrawal of foreign troops, according to Clause 10.

Ukraine needs time and space to concentrate on reforms. Economic successes of Israel, West Germany, and South Korea could be examples for Ukraine,<sup>24</sup> if Western economic and security assistance provides a necessary framework.

## **Influence on Northeast Asia**

Despite the Obama administration’s decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan and Iraq, the wars still continue there, and the war in Syria has been intensified. Russian aggression in Ukraine and the consequent tension between the West and Russia also divert the U.S. attention and efforts from Asia. These circumstances may demand revisiting Obama’s rebalancing strategy in the Asia-Pacific region (formulated in late 2011-early 2012).

Washington was unable to establish clearly defined “red lines” regarding the war in Syria, North Korean nuclear issue, and Chinese behavior in the sea. This became even more visible when president Obama excluded military support for Ukraine from the very beginning of the conflict. The U.S. reaction to the annexation of Crimea, instead of creating “red line,” was seen by Russia as “red carpet” for

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23. The West also closed eyes on open and immediate violation of Clause 1 of Minsk agreements: despite proclaimed ceasefire, Russian troops continued attacks for four more days and seized strategic town of Debaltsevo.

24. See, the eloquent post “Ukraine, South Korea in Europe” by Edmont Huet, armament expert, last modified June 10, 2015, <http://www.facebook.com/edmond.huet/posts/867524913283021>.

further actions in Donbas.<sup>25</sup> It definitely increased concerns of the U.S. allies in Asia, full of territorial and border issues.

## **China**

The inability of the West to react quickly to the *fait accompli* created by Russia's actions in Crimea may provide additional opportunities for Chinese policy and increase threats, both real and perceived. It could serve as a precedent for Beijing. For many years, the Chinese military advocated the capability to achieve a "quick and decisive victory by winning the first battle," especially in the case of Taiwan. China is creating a gray-zone in the East China Sea by regularly sending ships and aircrafts.<sup>26</sup>

Surely, dangerous developments happened before the Crimean crisis as well. Back in 2012, China captured Scarborough Shoal within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone, despite a U.S.-brokered deal under which China and the Philippines agreed to withdraw their vessels from the area and despite the 1951 U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty. Another accident happened on March 9, 2015 (that is during Crimean crisis), when two Chinese coast guard cutters blocked two Filipino transport vessels carrying supplies to the vessel marooned on the Ayungin/Renai Shoal.<sup>27</sup> China declines any attempt by the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea to resolve China's disputes with the Philippines.

Back in November 2013, China declared the air defense identification zone (ADIZ) that covered a large territory of the East China

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25. Tetsuo Kotani, "Japan's 'Proactive Contribution to Peace' and the Annexation of Crimea," (The National Bureau of Asian Research, April 22, 2014), <http://www.nbr.org/research/activity.aspx?id=422>.

26. Ibid. See also, Alexander Chieh-cheng Huang, "Taiwan Is No Crimea, But . . ." (The National Bureau of Asian Research, April 22, 2014), <http://www.nbr.org/research/activity.aspx?id=421>.

27. Morgane Farghene, "Implications of the Ukraine Crisis for Security, Non-Proliferation and Deterrence in North East Asia," (Foundation for Strategic Research, note No. 10, May 28, 2014), p. 3, <https://www.frstrategie.org/barreFRS/publications/notes/2014/201410.pdf>.

Sea. About half of the area overlaps with the Japanese ADIZ and to a small extent with the South Korean and Taiwanese ADIZ. Moreover, Chinese officials said that establishing a second ADIZ over the South China Sea would be in the country's interest.<sup>28</sup> All these challenge the status quo in East Asia. But despite the declared disapproval regarding ADIZ in the East China Sea, Washington did not postpone Vice President Joe Biden's trip to Beijing. Moreover, it advised U.S. commercial airlines to respect the zone (in contrast to Japan's and South Korea's advice to its commercial airlines to ignore China's demand to notify of flights through the zone in advance).<sup>29</sup>

The crisis over Ukraine also demonstrated the danger of economic dependence on a territorially aggressive neighbor (Europe's hesitation to sanction Russia). So the question arises: what would Washington's reaction be if Beijing decides to change the status quo.

Despite some predictions that Asian countries will compete to woo Putin (including Japan and South Korea) as an immediate result of the crisis after the annexation of Crimea, the U.S. allies are seeking additional assurances from Washington. Support of the Asian allies for the U.S. position on Crimea may also help Washington's policy in Asia. Therefore, the role of allies for U.S. policy in the region has also increased. In general, as Dmitri Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, suggests, the crisis over Ukraine will not strengthen Russian but the U.S. positions in relations with European and Asian allies, with "only one exception: China."<sup>30</sup> Fyodor Lukyanov, the chairman of Russia's Council for Foreign and Defense Policy, goes much further in his political "fantasy" about the year 2025 in *Die Welt* "If the Russians and Chinese march together."<sup>31</sup> So what was the real, not

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28. Ibid.

29. Brahma Chellaney, "India Risks Losing Out in a 'Contest of Ideas'," (The National Bureau of Asian Research, April 22, 2014), <http://www.nbr.org/research/activity.aspx?id=420>.

30. Dmitri Trenin, "China's Victory in Ukraine," (Carnegie Moscow Center, July 31, 2014), <http://carnegie.ru/2014/07/31/china-s-victory-in-ukraine/hjht>.

31. Fjodor Lukjanow, "Wenn Russen und Chinesen Gemeinsam Marschieren," *Die Welt*, March 30, 2015. Quoted in: Andreas Umland, "Towards a Greater

perceived, reaction of China to the conflict over Ukraine?

Neither Western great powers nor China has fulfilled their obligations under the Budapest memorandum, although Chinese commitments were much more limited and were a unilateral and quite amorphous declaration submitted to the UN General Assembly in December 1994: China “fully understands the desire of Ukraine for security assurance. . . . The Chinese Government has constantly opposed the practice of exerting political, economic or other pressure in international relations. . . . China recognizes and respects the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.”<sup>32</sup> But China was the only permanent member of the UN Security Council which abstained during the vote of UN General Assembly’s resolution on territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Beijing is afraid of Western support to Chinese dissidents which in perspective could lead to regime change. Thus, it somehow followed Russian argumentation of Western involvement in “regime change” in Ukraine. In return, Russia can support China’s steps towards Taiwan, however, the key factor here is not Russian, but the U.S. position. Moreover, China needs to be cautious about references to “self-determination of Crimean people” because of the debate over proclamation of independence of Taiwan, and the problems of Tibet and Xinjiang. Therefore, sticking to the principle of territorial integrity, Beijing had to freeze its economic projects in annexed Crimea.

What is much more important for Beijing in practical terms is the fact that it benefits a lot from Russia’s isolation in the West and Russia’s potential transformation into “younger partner” of China. In its turn, Russia can definitely blackmail the West by its rapprochement with China. This rapprochement started long before the Crimea crisis but since the crisis began, it has moved to another level.

In May 2014, two months after annexation of Crimea, Putin visited

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Asia? The Prospects of a Sino-Russian Entente,” *Eurozine*, June 22, 2015, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2015-06-22-umland-en.html>.

32. United Nations General Assembly, December 14, 1994, A/49/783, “Statement of the Chinese Government on the Security Assurance to Ukraine Issued on 4 December 1994.” Quoted in: Andreas Umland, “Towards a Greater Asia?”

Beijing where, after more than 10 years of negotiations, Gazprom and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) signed a USD 400 billion contract on gas deliveries to China for thirty years with 38 billion cubic meters annually. Kremlin presented it as a failure of Western sanctions, the “policy of isolation of Russia,” and “Russia’s Asia pivot,” but in reality China managed to secure prices for Russian gas, lower than what Russia’s European customers pay. Moreover, the exports will start not earlier than 2019 (with five billion cubic meters in the first stage), and will require at least USD 55 billion of investment on the Russian side. Because of Western sanctions, Russian companies paid special attention to Hong Kong and the Shanghai Stock Exchange. Moscow initiated a shift to bilateral trade with China in national currencies.<sup>33</sup> Also, Russia and Ukraine are the largest suppliers of modern weapons and military technologies to China. While Ukrainian producers are not under sanctions, but Moscow hopes that problems in the war-torn Ukrainian economy could increase the role of Russia in this sector.

President Xi Jinping visited Moscow on May 8-10, 2015 and participated in the celebration of 70th anniversary of Nazi Germany’s defeat. In return, Putin went to Beijing on September 2-3, 2015, to celebrate 70th anniversary of defeat of Japan and the end of World War II. Russian soldiers participated in the parade in Beijing as previously did Chinese soldiers in Moscow’s May 9 parade. Most major Western leaders as well as Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko did not visit Moscow’s military parade because of Russia’s intervention in Ukraine.

Despite the importance of China to Ukraine in both political and economic terms, Ukrainian president appeared in the same group with Western leaders and Japan who decided not to attend the memorial parade in Beijing because of China’s activity in East and South China Seas, though the reasons for Ukraine’s absence were different. Chinese *Global Times* stated that “Poroshenko and Putin can

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33. Jaroslaw Ćwiek-Karpowicz and Stanislav Secrieru, *Sanctions and Russia*, pp. 126-127.

take advantage of the ceremony and hold peaceful talks with each other under China's mediation." Moreover, "Ukraine, located along the [Silk Road] route, is an important country linking China and Europe."<sup>34</sup> But as China did not fulfill its own declaration regarding the Budapest memorandum and did not support the UN resolution condemning the annexation of Crimea, Beijing was not seen as a possible broker by Ukrainian society. And the Russia-China Joint Statement, adopted during Xi Jinping's visit to Moscow in May 2015, even mentioned "legitimate interests of all regions and peoples (?) of Ukraine."<sup>35</sup>

Moscow and Beijing intensified cooperation within BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), both of which Russia would like to use for counterbalancing the West. The latest summits of these two organizations symbolically coincided in Ufa, the capital of Bashkortostan in Russia on July 9-10, 2015. However, as Andreas Umland suggests, economic crisis heightening in Russia, its international isolation, and the decline in energy prices could lead to diminishing Russia's influence even within the BRICS group. And when India (together with Pakistan) joins the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (the procedure of their accession started in Ufa), it could not only increase the role of the SCO in Asia, but also diminish the centrality of Russia in this organization.<sup>36</sup>

Three sets of factors, according to Umland, limit Russian-Chinese rapprochement. The first one is declining political and economic weight of Russia which in connection with erratic political behavior, makes the country a more unpredictable partner not only for the West, but also for Japan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Israel.<sup>37</sup>

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34. Xia Yishan, "China Visit Good Opportunity to Relieve Ukraine's Internal Woes," *The Global Times*, July 29, 2015.

35. "Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and People's Republic of China on Deepening Comprehensive Partnership and Strategic Interaction and Promoting Mutually Beneficial Cooperation" (in Russian), May 8, 2015, <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/4969>.

36. Andreas Umland, "Towards a Greater Asia?"

Second, despite all the problems with Russia, most Europeans still consider Russians to be culturally Europeans. There is no such cultural proximity between Russia and Asia. Russians may consider themselves as separate civilization laying both in Europe and Asia but not as part of “Greater Asia,” although Dmitri Trenin plays with this idea as a substitute of “Greater Europe” for Russia.<sup>38</sup> Not only Trenin but more importantly Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, one of the founders of the “Russian world” (*Russkii mir*) concept, refer to the role of Prince St. Alexander Nevsky who fought with Catholic German knights while being loyal vassal to the Asian-born Golden Horde. Kirill stresses that Western influence was “hypocritical,” undermining Russia’s spiritual strength, and thus more dangerous than the Golden Horde.<sup>39</sup> However, *Russkii mir* with an accent on Asia will inevitably lose Slavic Ukraine and Belarus — that is, historic Kyiv Rus’ — which is considered in Russia, rightly or wrongly, as the background for Russian identity.

Thirdly, Russia and China will intensify their latent competition in the Far East and more openly in Central Asia controlled by Russia for centuries.

All Central Asian countries (except for Turkmenistan) are members of Russia-led CIS and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan joined Eurasian Economic Community which is transformed since January 2015 into Eurasian Economic Union, EEU (the process of Tajikistan becoming its member is delayed because of its border problems with Kyrgyzstan). But in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization created in 2001 (Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), Russia had already lost its centrality. After Russian intervention in Ukraine,

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37. Ibid.

38. Dmitri Trenin, “From Greater Europe to Greater Asia? The Sino-Russian Entente,” (Carnegie Moscow Center, April 9, 2015), <http://carnegie.ru/publications/?fa=59728>.

39. Kiril personally presented “Alexander Nevsky” in 2008 TV project “The Name of Russia” where Prince Alexander appeared on the first place in the list. See, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Frz-WQ4HjFE>.

Kazakhstan is afraid that Russia may use Russian-speaking population in the north of the country, if not for secession, then for increasing pressure, especially in the process of succession of Kazakhstan's aging President Nursultan Nazarbaev. (It is characteristic that Putin in 2014 referred to Kazakhstan as a nation that did not have its statehood before dissolution of the Soviet Union, which caused stormy reaction from Kazakhs).<sup>40</sup>

At the same time, China actively moves into Central Asia pursuing the Silk Road project. Beijing could also use contradictions within the EEU. Creation of the EEU has not led to the boom of trade within the EEU. Vice versa, in the first half of 2015, the mutual trade comprised USD 21.3 billion, which is only 74 percent of that of the first half of 2014 and USD 10 billion less than Russian-Chinese trade. For comparison: with the states outside the EEU, their foreign trade comprises USD 296.5 billion.<sup>41</sup> For Kazakhstan, import from the CIS countries fell from 54 percent in 2000 to 42 percent in 2014, while export dropped dramatically from 27 to 13 percent. Even for Russia, the main protagonist of integration in the post-Soviet space, import from the CIS countries fell during the same period from 34 to 11 percent while export only remains at the level of 13 percent.<sup>42</sup> Belarus and Kazakhstan refused to support Russia's counter-sanctions on food against the EU which led to exchange of retaliatory measures between EEU partners.

As to Russian-Chinese trade relations, leaders of the two countries in 2011 set the goal to reach a trade turnover of USD 100 billion in 2015 and USD 200 billion in 2020. From 2003 to 2012, it grew annually by 26.4 percent and in 2010 China became Russia's second trade

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40. Casey Michel, "Take Note, Putin: Kazakhstan Celebrates 550 Years of Statehood," *The Diplomat*, September 14, 2015.

41. Eurasian Economic Commission, "On Results of External and Mutual Trade of Goods of Eurasian Economic Union," August 17, 2015, [http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/act/integr\\_i\\_makroec/dep\\_stat/tradestat/analytics/Documents/express/June2015.pdf](http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/act/integr_i_makroec/dep_stat/tradestat/analytics/Documents/express/June2015.pdf).

42. Interstate Statistical Committee of the CIS, "Share of the CIS in Total Export/Import."

partner after the EU. However, in the first half of 2015, bilateral trade decreased by 31.4 percent and comprised only USD 31 billion. While contraction of Russia's export to a great extent is connected to the drop of oil prices, contraction of Russia's import is explained by the economic crisis in Russia. Western sanctions also hit the Russian economy and prevented active cooperation with Chinese commercial banks, including Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) and Bank of China which have their subsidiary banks in the U.S.<sup>43</sup>

Although Moscow finally allowed Chinese to buy minority shares in strategic raw fields of oil, gas, etc. and infrastructure projects, the level of direct investments from China to Russia decreased during the first seven months of 2015 by 20 percent. In August 2015, Chinese stock market collapsed by 30 percent. Also, there is a danger that China emerges as a monopolist in buying Russia's goods, first of all, energy resources. And China's economy will inevitably slow down.<sup>44</sup>

Therefore, Russia needs diversification in Asia. But when Moscow started its strategic shift to Asia in 2014, too many competitors were already in the market; Russian export lacked necessary infrastructure; the sanctions and overly cautious approach by the U.S. allies significantly complicated this process.<sup>45</sup> Although Russia claims that about forty states and international organizations are interested to liberalize trade with the EEU, and currently conducts consultations on FTA with Egypt, India and Iran, only one agreement was signed with Vietnam so far. Instead of Moscow's suggestion to conclude FTA between China and the EEU, Beijing proposed to negotiate a less ambitious trade and economic cooperation agreement.<sup>46</sup>

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43. Alexander Gabuev, "Sino-Russian Trade after a Year of Sanctions," (Carnegie Moscow Center, September 11, 2015), <http://carnegie.ru/eurasiaoutlook/?fa=61240>.

44. Ibid.

45. Alexander Gabuev, "On Whom Yuan Fell Down: How China's Economic Difficulties Threaten Russia" (in Russian), (Carnegie Moscow Center, August 13, 2015), <http://carnegie.ru/2015/08/13/ru-61009/iems>.

46. Stanislav Secrieru, *Russia under Sanctions*, p. 59.

## **Japan**

Since the formation of the second Abe cabinet (September 2012), Prime Minister Shinzo Abe invested a lot in creating an atmosphere of personal trust with president Putin. Several factors contributed to that. First, after the Fukushima nuclear accident in 2011 and consequent shutdown of nuclear power plants in Japan (the first one resumed operation in August 2015), the country badly needed new energy supplies. Second, Russia could become an important partner for Japan in offsetting the rise of China. Third, Abe tried to create a better atmosphere for the progress on the issues of peace treaty and “northern territories.” In July 2013, Abe arrived in Moscow for the first state visit to Russia by a Japanese leader in a decade. Symbolically, on February 7, 2014 (which is the national “day of northern territories” in Japan), Abe visited the opening ceremony of Sochi Olympic Games, despite the absence of major Western leaders.

Nevertheless, as Shigeki Hakamada, chairman of the academic Council on National Security Problems “Anpoken,” stated, Putin’s line regarding “northern territories” hardened. It happened even before the Crimea crisis and was confirmed after it. According to Putin, although the 1956 Joint Russian-Japanese Declaration confirmed “transfer” of Shikotan and Habomai, it is not clear “on what conditions and whose sovereignty the islands will become under” (!). Hakamada describes it as a clear “revision” of history and joint declarations.<sup>47</sup>

Japan as a member of the G7 could not avoid some sanctions, but at first immediately after the annexation of Crimea, Tokyo only introduced light sanctions against Russia. Moscow noted Japan’s caution and in turn, did not introduce a food embargo against Japan. Moreover, as Yoko Hirose suggests this “soft approach regarding Russia’s annexation of Crimea was inconsistent with the Japanese policy to recover the entire Northern Territories,” and “although Putin and

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47. Shigeki Hakamada and Dmitri Streltsov, “The Kuril Problem and Russian-Japanese Relations: Discussion” (in Russian), (Carnegie Moscow Center, May 25, 2015), <http://carnegie.ru/2015/05/25/ru-60184/i8zc>.

Abe maintain positive relations, Japan-Russia relations are unlikely to move forward as long as Russia does not improve its actions concerning Ukraine.”<sup>48</sup> With increasing conflict in Donbas and expanded Western sanctions, Tokyo also introduced sanctions against leading Russian arms exporters and five top banks, including Sberbank, VTB, Gazprombank, Rosselkhozbank, and VEB (Vnesheconombank).

However, opportunities for dialogue with Russia on Kuril Islands are narrowing not because of sanctions, as some Russian analysts suggested, but because of the rise of chauvinism in Russia after the annexation of Crimea. It prevents concessions on Kuril Islands.

The second factor which complicates Russian-Japanese relations is Moscow’s rapprochement with Beijing. Russian and Chinese navies held joint maneuvers in the East China Sea in May 2014 and in 2015. In the course of 2014, Russian air forces exceeded the Chinese ones in terms of the number of incidents that created dangerous situations and made Japanese air forces fly for their interception due to the violation of Japanese airspace.<sup>49</sup>

Given the rapprochement between Russia and China, Tokyo eased the ban on military related exports to stimulate joint arms development with allies and arms exports. Also, according to some sources, lawmakers from Japan’s Liberal Democratic Party were trying to create a Japanese version of the U.S. *Taiwan Relations Act* which could formalize the current unofficial ties.<sup>50</sup>

On June 6, 2015, Abe made the first ever visit to Ukraine as the Japanese prime minister. Japan decided to provide Ukraine with USD 1.5 billion of financial aid when Kyiv fulfills IMF demands. And immediately on June 9, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced that Moscow would accelerate the construction of military facilities

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48. Yoko Hirose, “Japan-Russia Relations: Toward a Peace Treaty and Beyond,” (The International Relations and Security Network, March 25, 2015), <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?id=189292>.

49. Maxim Krylov, “Japanese Pacifism: Why Premier Abe Decided to Refuse It” (in Russian), (Carnegie Moscow Center, July 9, 2015), <http://carnegie.ru/2015/07/09/ru-60472/iaz5>.

50. Morgane Farghene, “Implications of the Ukraine Crisis.”

on the disputed Kuril Islands. In the summer of 2015, the Russian parliament passed a ban on driftnet fishing for salmon in Russia's exclusive economic zone which would have a serious effect on Japan's fishery industry (because all Kuril Islands now currently belong to Russia, the UN Maritime Commission in March 2014 confirmed that 52,000 square kilometers in the middle of the Sea of Okhotsk are now part of Russian continental shelf).

Putin's visit to Japan planned for the autumn of 2014 was postponed. Russia's prime minister's trip to Kuril Islands in August 2015 complicated the situation but both sides still have plans for Putin's visit to Japan before the end of 2015. If it happens while Russian troops are still in Ukraine, it may become a symbolic success of Russian diplomacy and a wrong message from Japan's side.

### ***Korean Peninsula***

Seoul condemned Russia's aggression in Ukraine and decided to provide USD 500,000 humanitarian assistance to Ukraine through a UN organization and the International Committee of the Red Cross. President Park Geun-hye did not take part in Moscow's parade on May 9, 2015 (nor did major Western leaders and Japan). Nevertheless, Moscow hoped that relations with Republic of Korea would not suffer as much as its relations with Japan, and Seoul would continue its own game aimed at the unification of the country. South Korea has not joined economic sanctions against Russia yet. President Park and President Putin were the highest officials to attend the military parade in Beijing on September 3, 2015.

After Crimea's annexation, Moscow decided to invest in major gas pipeline that will run from Sakhalin Island through the Korean Peninsula. South Korea showed interest in this project and in other initiatives connecting its transportation network to the Trans-Siberian Railway. Russian coal was delivered for the first time to South Korea by rail from Khasan via the North Korean port of Rajin in late 2014.<sup>51</sup>

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51. Nadège Rolland, "What the Ukraine Crisis Means for Asia," *The Diplomat*,

On December 9, 2014, Seoul hosted a regular economic forum with Russia with participation of seven Russian governors led by Yuri Trutnev, deputy prime minister and presidential envoy to the Far Eastern district. The underlying idea was participation of South Korean business in the projects in the Far East which could become a platform for trilateral cooperation with North Korea. However, Dmitri Trenin believes that as in the case of the U.S.-Japanese relations, after annexation of Crimea and Russian-Chinese rapprochement, South Korea has no other choice than to certify additional U.S. assurances and to join Western sanctions.<sup>52</sup>

One more key factor pushes Seoul in this direction. Crimea's annexation presented to North Korea additional arguments to stick to its nuclear weapons. Moreover, annexation of Crimea was seen in North Korea as a chance to increase the margin of provocations in the Peninsula. Using as a pretext for annual U.S.-South Korea joint military maneuvers in February 2014, North Korea fired 25 short-range rockets into the sea off its east coasts on March 17 (the day after Crimean "referendum"). Kim Jong-un was overseeing an air force exercise, and urging his fighter pilots to embrace "the spirit of becoming human bombs." It was followed by exchange of artillery fire across the sea border.<sup>53</sup> These actions by North Korea raised stakes for the debates to restore the six-party talks, and prospects of these talks deteriorated even further.

In reaction to elevated tension in East Asia, the U.S. announced a decision to deploy two Navy destroyers equipped with missile defense systems and the second X-band missile defense radar in Japan. Trilateral security talks with Japan and South Korea were intensified. The U.S. and Taiwan finally saved F-16 upgrade deal after budget cut. The U.S., Japan, and South Korea had a summit meeting on the sidelines of the Nuclear Security Summit in the Netherlands. The summit was held on March 24, 2014, with Japan pledging to return to the United

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January 19, 2015.

52. Dmitri Trenin, "China's Victory in Ukraine."

53. Morgane Farghene, "Implications of the Ukraine Crisis."

States more than 315 kilograms of weapons-grade plutonium and a supply of highly enriched uranium.<sup>54</sup> It was a clear signal that countries stick to non-proliferation (although both Japan and South Korea have technical capacities for development of the nuclear weapon).

At the same time, Russia will likely continue to adhere to the status quo on the Korean Peninsula. A domestic crisis in the North could lead to de facto Chinese control over North or hypothetical emergence of united Korea which would be strong, more assertive and pro-American. Russia is also not interested in further development of North Korea's nuclear weapons program, "but given current developments in Ukraine, Moscow will press harder than ever for a more measured response."<sup>55</sup> Russia's position in the six-party talks will move closer to China in exchange for Chinese support on global issues more important for Russia.

South Korea has been disappointed by Washington's lack of leverage over Beijing. And China in dealing with South Korea speculates that red lines are not clearly defined by the U.S. (and Crimean crisis can be seen in this context).<sup>56</sup>

In its turn, Moscow will continue to play in Pyongyang to have more leverage for dealing with the U.S. and South Korea. Clearly, the previous level of Pyongyang-Moscow relations cannot be restored but the two countries moved closer to each other. On the symbolical level, "year of friendship" between Russia and Democratic People's Republic of Korea was declared from May 2015 to May 2016. During last year, the number of visits of high-level Russian officials to Pyongyang and vice versa was higher than that over the whole previous decade. The peak had to be Kim Jong-un's first ever trip abroad — for May 9 parade in Moscow. Although it was suddenly cancelled

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54. *Ibid.*

55. Georgy Toloraya, "A Tale of Two Peninsulas: How Will The Crimean Crisis Affect Korea?" (38 North, March 13, 2014), <http://38north.org/2014/03/gtoloraya031314/>.

56. Lee Seong-hyon, "The Korean Angle on Crimean Fallout: America's Perception Gap," (The National Bureau of Asian Research, April 22, 2014), <http://www.nbr.org/research/activity.aspx?id=423>.

by North Korea, it actually did not hurt Kremlin as Kim's presence near the Mausoleum with Putin would cause image problems for Russia (presence of Zimbabwean dictator Robert Mugabe was already a notorious sign, although it was at least somehow justified by his formal position during 2015 as a ceremonial chairperson of the African Union).

In the spring of 2014, Russian officials set a goal to increase trade with North Korea by tenfold: from USD 93 million up to USD 1 billion (that is, still only one-seventh of the present turnover between DPRK and China; in 2014 the correlation ratio was 1:75!). Pyongyang is interested to diminish dependence on China which comprises 70 percent of the North Korean trade turnover. But political interests from both sides are not supported by the weak North Korean economy and the lack of financial resources from the Russian side to provide politically motivated support. Therefore, in reality while North Korean trade with China is growing, that with Russia has been gradually shrinking for two decades.<sup>57</sup>

One more consequence of Russia's confrontation with the West over Ukraine is Moscow's desire to use conflicts in other parts of the world for playing global chess with the West. On the one hand, Putin raised suspicion that it may synchronize tensions in other regions (Korean Peninsula or Syria) with offensive in Ukraine to lessen Western ability to react. On the other hand, increasing tension in other regions (first of all military presence in Syria which was dramatically intensified in September 2015 and the refugee crisis in the EU) is being used by Russia to demonstrate its importance for both the West and China and to bargain over Ukraine in an attempt to reduce Western sanctions. This is the game Putin has started to play in late September 2015 when Russian air forces appeared in Syria (formally to fight the self-proclaimed "Islamic State" but in reality supporting Assad regime against Syrian opposition).<sup>58</sup>

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57. Andrei Lankov, "Moscow — Pyongyang: One Year of a New Friendship," (Carnegie Moscow Center, July 7, 2015), <http://carnegie.ru/eurasiaoutlook/?fa=60607>.

## Conclusion

Since the disintegration of the USSR, Russia and Ukraine moved in different directions, both politically and geopolitically: authoritarian Putin put emphasis on restoration of Russia-led supranational institutions, designed in the form of Customs Union, which now transformed into Eurasian Economic Union, while Ukraine moved to the signing of association agreement with the EU. Despite Russia's attempt to present 2013-2014 Euromaidan as a "Western plot," it was a domestic mass protest to prevent president Yanukovich from sliding into authoritarianism and into Russia-led Customs Union.

Subsequent Russia's intervention in Crimea and Donbas was open violation of international obligations and security assurances given by great powers to Ukraine. From strategic partner, first of all in energy sphere, Russia turned into a strategic rival. This crisis undermined the credibility of great powers' guarantees to denuclearized states, thus having created dangerous precedents for both Koreas, Japan and other U.S. allies in Asia.

There was a need for a strong Western response but first sanctions introduced after Crimea were weak. Nevertheless, increased and sectoral Western sanctions, although belated, started to work. In the Asia-Pacific region, the sanctions were joined by Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. These sectoral sanctions are conditioned on full implementation of Minsk-2 agreement which includes demand for withdrawal of foreign troops and "volunteers" from Ukraine.

Moscow tries to bargain globally with the West, using rapprochement with China and the situation in the Korean Peninsula, Syria, and Iran. Trying to avoid sanctions and isolation, Russia moved closer to China. But this rapprochement has natural limitations. Opening of Asian markets to Russia also has limitations due to security concerns of U.S. allies and current Western sanctions. Events in Crimea, Russia's

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58. Andrei Kolesnikov, "Putin's Crooked Road to Damascus," (Project Syndicate, September 30, 2015), <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/putin-popularity-soviet-nostalgia-by-andrei-kolesnikov-2015-09>.

drift to China, and new opportunities for Beijing increase the role of U.S. commitments to its allies in Asia which strengthens the necessity of alliance with Washington.

South Korea has not joined economic sanctions, nevertheless it is viewed in Ukrainian social media as an example of how to “live with the enemy” and simultaneously successfully modernize its economy, army, and political system.

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## The Attitude of the United States towards the Unification of the Korean Peninsula\*

Hyun-Wook Kim

This essay examines the attitude of the United States towards the Korean unification. First, this essay begins with looking at different ways to achieve the unification: North Korean federal system, South Korean confederate system, North Korean contingency and South Korea peacefully absorbing North Korea. Secondly, the author examines the U.S. position towards the Korean unification. The author compares the U.S. positions in the German and Korean unification cases. Lastly, a more specific attitude of the United States towards the Korean unification is examined: the U.S. attitude towards the Korean unification, the future of the Korea-U.S. alliance after the unification, the interests and concerns of the U.S. in the unification, etc. In the final section, the author provides some policy suggestions for the unification of the Korean Peninsula.

**Keywords:** Korean unification, Federation, Confederation, Contingency, German unification, ROK-U.S. alliance

### Introduction

As the Korean unification issue becomes one of the hot topics in Korea nowadays, diplomatic ties with neighboring countries are also pivotal issues. Among many, the United States is the most important country that has significant influence on the Korean unification. During the Lee Myung-bak government, the U.S. and Korea agreed upon the principles of the Korean Peninsula, which is that the two countries support a “peaceful unification based upon market economy and free

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\* This essay represents the author’s personal viewpoint and does not represent the official view of Korea National Diplomatic Academy.

democracy.”<sup>1</sup> During the Park Geun-hye government, the two countries agreed upon a “peaceful unification based upon free market economy, democracy, and denuclearization.”

Despite these agreements on the Korean unification between the two countries, it does not seem that the U.S. position on the Korean unification is very supportive. With the rise of the Chinese capabilities, the United States focuses on emphasizing the alliance and expresses concerns about the frictions of the U.S.-Japan-Korea trilateral relationship. Recently, the United States has been supportive of Japan because Japanese security policy coalesces with the strategic objective of the United States, and the U.S., at the same time, has expressed concerns over the consolidation of the Korea-China relation. Under this complex balance of power situation in which many countries in Northeast Asia vie for strengthening their capabilities, the possibility to realize the Korean unification seems less than a wishful thought. Countries would prefer maintaining status quo and would be against the moves towards the Korean unification, and the U.S. position for it would be no exception.

In this background, this essay attempts to examine the U.S. positions on the Korean Peninsula. First, the author examines possible scenarios to achieve the Korean unification. This includes unification approaches historically developed by the two Koreas, North Korean contingency, and German unification formula. Second, the essay examines the interests and concerns the United States has on the unification, along with the future mechanism of the ROK-U.S. alliance. Lastly, the essay provides some policy suggestions for the Korean unification.

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## Scenarios for the Korean Unification

### *Approaches of Confederation/Federation*

#### South Korean Approach of Confederate System

Historically, South Korea has been supportive of the Korean unification by confederate system. In 1972, the two countries announced the “July 4 North-South Joint Communiqué,” which provided the principles of the unification — independence, peace, and national unity. In 1982, the Chun Doo-hwan administration proclaimed the “national reconciliation and democratic reunification measures” and stated that “the unification should be achieved based upon the principle of national self-determination and upon democratic process and peaceful method which could reflect opinions of entire nation.”

In September 1989, the Roh Tae-woo administration presented one national community unification plan and presented independence, peace, and democracy as unification principles. According to this plan, the two Koreas would enact the national community charter, build a transitional system of North-South confederate system, coordinate detailed processes and methods for unification within the confederate system, and finally achieve a unified state by a general election.

Based upon the one national community unification plan, President Kim Young-sam presented the national community unification plan, which consists of three phases: reconciliation and cooperation phase, North-South confederation phase, and unified state phase. Later on, the Kim Dae-jung administration presented the republic federal system or three-phased unification plan. According to this plan, the first phase is North-South confederation, the second phase is the republic federalism and the third phase is unified Korea. Also, this plan pictures the unified Korea as based on liberal democracy and market economy.<sup>2</sup> President Kim Dae-jung accepted the idea of the national

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2. Lim Hyunjin and Jung Youngchul, *Searching for the 21st century Unified Korea: Dialectics of Division and Unification* (in Korean) (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 2005), pp. 32-46.

community unification plan after his inauguration as a president.

There are two characteristics of the South Korean unification policies. The first is that it sets the South Korean system of market economy and democracy as an ultimate objective of the unification. The confederate approach aims to continue the two-state/two-system as a part of the transition, thereby achieving unification ultimately. That is, this approach first intends to achieve economic integration based upon two different political systems.

The second characteristic lies in its functional approach. The functional approach has an assumption that two countries would pursue economic integration by way of their nonpolitical interests, which would ultimately spill over into political integration. This approach is helpful in achieving unification, and was also a valid argument undergirding the European integration. But what should be noted is that the functional integration would not automatically spill over into political and military integration. There need extra efforts to be made in achieving integration both in political and military terms.

### North Korean Approach of Federal System

The North Korean unification formula is a federal system. According to this approach, there should be measures in political and military aspects first. That is, the unification process is possible only after political and military issues are settled. According to this approach, the two Koreas should build the status of one-state/two-system, which is subsequently followed by political integration. Based upon this idea, in 1980, North Korea presented its unification plan called the Democratic Confederate Republic of Koryo in the 6th Congress of Korean Workers' Party. This plan states that "the North and South Koreas would admit and accept each other's ideologies and systems as they are, based upon which the North and South would bring about a democratic unified government in which the two Koreas would equally participate. The two Koreas would create confederate republic that share the same privileges and responsibilities of the two Koreas

and undertake regional self-governance respectively under such ideologies and systems, by which they ultimately achieve unification.”<sup>3</sup>

There are two characteristics of the North Korea’s unification policies. First, it is a federal approach that prioritizes political and military issue-solving. It presents as basic conditions of the unification the withdrawal of the U.S. forces in Korea, the peace treaty between the United States and North Korea, etc. That is, the North Korean federal approach argues that the two Koreas should solve the political-military issues first, and then proceed to expanding exchanges in economic, social, and cultural aspects. Second, the approach does not presume unification as a monistic one-system state. It first admits a federal system as a consummate stage of unification and leaves the systemic integration issue as an assignment to be solved for the next generation.<sup>4</sup>

Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-il in the inter-Korean summit meeting in 2000 agreed that there existed common elements between the South Korean confederate system and the North Korean low level of federation. Both of these approaches share that they all pursue incremental and phased unification. But both of them have problems in achieving political integration. The North Korean federal approach does not present specific ways to achieve political integration after the two Koreas achieve unification of one-state/two-systems. There remains a task of how a federal state with two different systems can manage a unified state. The South Korean confederate approach presumes the objective of unification as one-state/one-system, but this objective is not easy to achieve based upon a functional approach.

### ***Unification by North Korean Contingency***

OPLAN 5029 categorizes North Korean contingency into six typologies of unstable situations: regime change resulting from an accident

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3. South Korea, Board of National Unification, “The 6th Party Congress Central Committee Project Unity Report” (in Korean), *Chosun Workers’ Party Congress Data Collection*, vol. 3 (Seoul: Board of National Unification, 1988).

4. Lim and Jung, *Searching for the 21st century Unified Korea*, pp. 72-75.

that happens to Kim Jong-un, civil war by coup d'état, a hostage situation involving South Korean nationals, large-scale escape of people from North Korea, leak of North Korean WMD like nuclear and biochemical weapons and large-scale natural disaster. During the Cold War period and early post-Cold War period, there was a scenario that suggests South Korea absorb North Korea when a contingency situation happens within the North. But this is not a realistic scenario anymore. In the early post-Cold War period, the United States was enjoying its superpower status. Under this background, when the North Korean contingency happens, it was more likely than now that the United States would intervene in the North along with the South Korean troops, as the Chinese power was not as significant as now, thus enabling South Korea to absorb the North to achieve unification. But the current Northeast Asian situation, in which the United States and China balance with each other around the Korean Peninsula, does not make the U.S. intervention simple.

Under this circumstance, if a contingency happens in North Korea, the United States would leave South Korea to take a leading role and it would take a supporting role.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, if a contingency happens within the North, the United States would hesitate to intervene assertively unless there emerges a risk in controlling WMD within the North. In contrast, China would be intervening in North Korea in order to control North Korean refugees and WMD. In addition, there is also a possibility that China would attempt to build a pro-Chinese regime in post-contingency North Korea.<sup>6</sup> If the United States is hesitant about intervention and Chinese intervention is very assertive, it would not be easy for South Korea to intervene independently.

The South Korean intervention is not easily accepted by international law. That is, the fact that the two Koreas simultaneously became member states of the United Nations in 1991 can be a legal basis

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5. Bruce Klingner, "New Leaders, Old Dangers: What North Korean Succession Means for the U.S.," *Backgrounder*, no. 2397 (Heritage Foundation, April 7, 2010), p. 13.

6. Bruce W. Bennett, *Preparing for the Possibility of a North Korean Collapse* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2013).

based on which the two Koreas are separate and independent states, and this makes the South Korea intervention a violation against the UN Charter.<sup>7</sup> According to the UN Charter Article 2(4), "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations."<sup>8</sup>

The most active state in intervention is China,<sup>9</sup> which would attempt to build a refugee camp in the border area between China and North Korea so that it could control and manage North Korean refugees. Even though it can be regarded as a dead letter,<sup>10</sup> there still exists a bilateral treaty between China and North Korea that calls for guaranteeing China's automatic intervention when North Korea is involved in a military conflict. Even though North Korea does not request Chinese intervention, China could use the bilateral treaty to justify its intervention. Furthermore, there exists a possibility that, with an excuse to stabilize the contingency situation, China could

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7. Park Hwee Rhak, "A Realistic Analysis and Task on North Korean Contingency and the Unification" (in Korean), *National Security* 16, no. 4 (2010), p. 72.

8. Even though there would exist many perspectives that could justify South Korea's intervention in the North Korean Contingency, they are not sufficient enough to grant to South Korean government a privilege to intervene over other neighboring countries. For more argument, see, Hong Seong-Phil, "When North Korea Fails: Legitimacy of Intervention under International Law with focus on the Possible Actions by South Korea" (in Korean), *Seoul International Law Journal* 19, no. 1 (2012), pp. 262-266; Park Hwee Rhak, "An Analysis on Logics and Tasks for the South Korean Military Intervention into a North Korean Sudden Collapse" (in Korean), *Journal of International Politics* 20, no. 1 (2015), pp. 44-50; Hong Hyun Ik, *International Intervention and Preparations and Responses of South Korea to North Korean Contingency Situation* (Seongnam: Sejong Institute, 2013), pp. 13-18.

9. For more explanation for Chinese intervention, see Soh Cheehyung, "Chinese Intervention against North Korea's Situation of Sudden Change and Countermeasures," *Policy Studies*, no. 180 (Spring 2014), pp. 87-90.

10. Recently many Chinese experts have argued that China-North Korea bilateral treaty is no more effective, but this attitude of China is easily changeable according to Chinese strategic calculation. Refer to <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/bulletin/2011/08/31/0200000000AKR20110831233252014.HTML>.

proceed to Pyongyang area and establish a pro-Chinese regime.

In this case, the U.S. and China can have a deal so that the contingency would lead to maintaining a status quo, and for this purpose the United Nations could be a legal player to address this situation. One interesting fact is that the U.S. would not strongly object to Chinese intervention. One U.S. policymaker mentioned that the U.S. does not have strong intention and capabilities to intervene in North Korea when a contingency happens. Currently, the U.S. wants South Korea to take the leading role in intervention, with the U.S. supporting the South Korean military. If China intervenes and takes care of refugee and WMD problems, the U.S. would allow Chinese intervention, as China would take care of the U.S. concerns instead.<sup>11</sup>

As explained, it is not easy for South Korea to lead the North Korean contingency situation to the Korean unification. The U.S. and China officially support the unification, but at the same time none of them does not want the other party to have more influence on the Korean Peninsula than itself. Under this balance of power situation, the North Korean contingency would make these countries choose to maintain status quo of the Korean Peninsula.

### ***South Korea Peacefully Absorbing North Korea***

This approach is similar to the way German unification has been achieved. According to this approach, the unification process begins with the two Korean peoples sharing a cultural similarity and the North Korean people having a favorable identity towards the South's system. Like in the German case, this approach considers the unification to be accomplished based upon the South Korean system through the process of a general election. That is, the South would ultimately absorb the North peacefully.

The North Korean people's pro-South Korean identity is an important element even during the North Korean contingency. As mentioned, when the contingency happens in the North, China would be

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11. An Interview in Washington, D.C.

active in its intervention. If North Koreans are favorable to the South Korean system or feel that they share the same national identity with the South, then the degree of the North Korean people's antagonism to China would be high. This approach would be the most contributive to the U.S. interest, and also would be most contributive to the post-unification maintenance and development of the ROK-U.S. alliance system.

Currently, the biggest concern about two Korea's unification approaches — whether it is confederate or federal — is political integration. This in fact has been the problem in the Yemen case. The Yemen unification has not been achieved with North and South Yemens deepening their economic, cultural and social exchanges. Rather, the arbitration of the Arab League member states was significant in achieving the unification. Afterwards, two Yemens have achieved the first-phase unification, which was the federalist unification by the proportional representation system. Several years later, in a general election, the voting outcome came out to be favorable to North Yemen, and the South Yemen politicians opposed the outcome. Subsequently, they mobilized force to change the outcome which was suppressed in the end. This led to the second-phase unification which has been accomplished by the force mobilization.<sup>12</sup> The Yemen case has signified that the unification without socio-cultural connectedness would be fragile.

The political integration is an important endpoint and a hurdle at the same time to be overcome. In order to achieve this, socio-cultural connectedness is very important. Actually, the West German unification policy of so-called "New Eastern Policy (*Neue Ostpolitik*)" has focused on building socio-cultural connectedness. After the collapse of the Berlin Wall in January 1990 in Leipzig, East Germany, 200,000 East German people participated in a large-scale anti-communist protest and demanded the German unification.<sup>13</sup> Also, when a free

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12. Lim and Jung, *Searching for the 21st century Unified Korea*, pp. 293-294.

13. Hwang Byungduk et al., *German Peaceful Unification and the Twenty Years' Development after the Unification* (in Korean) (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2011), p. 173.

general election was held in East Germany in March 1990, the outcome of the election in which 93.4 percent of the East German people participated, was the victory of Alliance for Germany. The conservative election coalition Alliance for Germany, which was composed of Democratic Awakening (DA), the German Social Union (DSU), and the CDU (East), tried to solicit votes by promising freedom and prosperity based on the West German model. The Alliance turned out to be the clear winner with 48 percent of the vote.<sup>14</sup>

## **The United States and the Korean Unification**

### ***German Unification and the United States***

The German unification was achieved by integrating two Germanys politically, and what was important in the unification process was to make the East German people have aspirations for the West German system through economic cooperation and exchanges. That is, the Chancellor Willy Brandt's New Eastern Policy has contributed to changing the East German people's identity to be West Germany oriented. The result was that, in the East German general election for the German unification, the majority of East German people voted for "Alliance for Germany" which insisted on early unification. The result was the German unification with West Germany's initiative.

During the German unification process in Europe, with the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the former Soviet influence was diminishing and the United States was increasing its power. Under this circumstance, the United States supported the German unification as the unified Germany could be an important element for the U.S. interest. In the European Summit speech, President Bush reconfirmed the U.S. support for the German unification and announced four principles of the

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14. German Historical Institute, "Images — End of the GDR and Unification," modified date unknown, [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_image.cfm?image\\_id=3067](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=3067).

German unification:

- (1) The United States should support true German self-determination without endorsing any specific outcome;
- (2) Unification must be consistent with Germany's membership in NATO and the EC;
- (3) Moves toward unity should be gradual, peaceful, and step by step;
- (4) On the issue of postwar borders, all should respect "the principles adopted in the Helsinki Final Act recognizing the inviolability of frontiers in Europe, and allowing for the possibility of peaceful change."<sup>15</sup>

In July 1990, the Chancellor Kohl and Secretary General Gorbachev reached a compromise, which allowed Germany to retain its NATO membership. In exchange, it agreed to disarmament and offered economic aid to the Soviet Union. Some of the important points of the compromise are:

- (1) With unification of Germany, the rights and responsibilities of the Four Powers with respect to Germany as a whole and Berlin will be terminated.
- (2) The Soviet Union will withdraw its troops from the GDR, but will have left German territory by 1994 at the latest.
- (3) The United Germany will reduce the size of the army to 370,000 troops within three to four years.
- (4) United Germany will not produce, own, or possess ABC weapons, and will remain a member of the nonproliferation treaty.<sup>16</sup>

At that time, the United States supported German unification under the condition that Germany remains in NATO and EC. The United States insisted to the Soviet Union that unless Germany remains in

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15. Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 113.

16. German Historical Institute, "Result of the Kohl-Gorbachev Talks (July 15-16, 1990)," *One Germany in Europe 1989-2009*, German History in Documents and Images, modified date unknown, [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=3012](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3012).

NATO, Germany will be neutralized and make no attempt to possess nuclear weapons. The United States promised to the Soviet Union that the NATO troops would not be stationed in the eastern territory of Germany until 1994. There existed the U.S. interests in the German unification. First, the eastern German territory would develop economically, which would contribute to the increase of the U.S. export to Germany along with the U.S. investment. Second, the two plus four agreement (Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany) described that NATO troops devoid of German troops would not be stationed in the former East German territory until the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. Germany also will not produce, own, or possess ABC (atomic, biological, and chemical) weapons. Thus, the German unification would increase the U.S. influence within NATO. Third, the German position on the CSCE (regional institutionalization, expansion of security functions, etc.) would conflict with the U.S. position. The United States wanted to enlarge the role of NATO rather than CSCE, which would be enabled by the German unification.<sup>17</sup>

At that time, the priority of the U.S. position on the German unification was to keep Germany within NATO. The former Soviet opposed the German unification, but could not express its position assertively due to the end of the Cold War and the strong support of the United States. In this situation, the Soviet priority changed to economic aid.

Nowadays in Northeast Asia, due to the rise of China and the decrease of the U.S. influence, it is not clear whether the U.S. would support the Korean unification as actively as it did in the German unification. And also, it is not clear what would be the Chinese position. In the German unification case, Germany promised to the former Soviet Union that it would not deploy Western troops to the former East German territory until 1994 in order to persuade the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. It also promised that Germany within NATO would not pose a direct threat to the former Soviet Union, so that it

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17. Paul E. Gallis and Steven J. Woehrel, "Germany after Unification: Implications for U.S. Interests," (CRS Issue Brief, Congressional Research Service, February 20, 1991).

would smooth down the Soviet opposition to the German unification.<sup>18</sup> In order to achieve the Korean unification, diplomatic efforts as such should be made towards the United States and China.

### ***The U.S. Position towards the Korean Unification***

Historically, the U.S. has been supportive of the unification of the Korean Peninsula. Presidents Bush and Clinton supported the peaceful unification based upon “terms acceptable to the Korean people.” In 2009, President Lee Myung-bak and Barack Obama announced the Joint Vision for the Alliance in which both presidents supported the peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula based on the principles of free democracy and a market economy.<sup>19</sup> In 2013, President Park Geun-hye and Barack Obama announced that they would foster “peaceful unification based on the principles of denuclearization, democracy and a free market economy.”<sup>20</sup>

Notwithstanding, it is not certain whether in reality the U.S. would support the Korean unification as it did in the German case. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, there are several priorities the U.S. has on its policy towards the Korean Peninsula: 1) prevent horizontal proliferation; 2) stop vertical proliferation; 3) denuclearize; 4) make plans for contingencies; 5) promote engagement; and 6) improve the situation for the North Korean people.<sup>21</sup> That is, the United States’ priorities lie in preventing North Korea’s nuclear proliferation

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18. Kim Kyuryoon et al., *The Future of the Korean Unification and the Expectations of Four Neighboring Countries* (in Korean) (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2013), p. 62.

19. The United States, Office of the White House Press Secretary, “Joint Vision for the Alliance of the United States of America and the Republic of Korea.”

20. The United States, Office of the White House Press Secretary, “Joint Declaration in Commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of the Alliance between the Republic of Korea and the United States of America,” May 7, 2013, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/07/joint-declaration-commemoration-60th-anniversary-alliance-between-republ>.

21. Jack Pritchard and John Tilelli, “U.S. Policy towards the Korean Peninsula,” (Task Force Report, Council on Foreign Relations, June 2010), pp. 43-44.

and denuclearizing North Korea, and if these priorities are met, there is no reason for the U.S. to be active in supporting the unification of the Korean Peninsula.

This makes more sense under the current Northeast Asian situation. In the case of the German unification, the demise of the Soviet Union, the united Germany and the NATO expansion have brought about the increase of the U.S. influence and interests. However, in Northeast Asia, due to the rise of China, it is uncertain whether the Korean unification would be helpful in increasing the hegemony of the United States in this region. Also, due to the current solid relationship between Korea and China, there emerges a U.S. concern that the unified Korea could be pro-Chinese rather than pro-American. This would make the United States choose the status quo of the Korean Peninsula over the unification.

### ***The Future of ROK-U.S. Alliance after the Unification***

The future of the post-unification ROK-U.S. alliance will be determined by how the unification is achieved. If the unification is achieved by confederate/federal approaches, the alliance can be less cohesive and the U.S. forces can be withdrawn to the United States. The role of the alliance can be very limited and it will take time for the alliance to take a new role, if any. Thus, this essay will confine the debate of the future of the alliance within the scenario of the unification achieved by the South Korean initiative.

Even when the unification is initiated by South Korea, there would be many changes in the alliance mechanism. An alliance consists of attitudinal and behavioral aspects.<sup>22</sup> The attitudinal aspect includes alliance rationale, threat perception, alliance objective, etc. The behavioral aspect includes military command structure, military strategy, defense-cost sharing, base relocation, etc. The unified Korea should

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22. Ole Holsti, P. Terrence Hopmann, and John Sullivan, *Unity and Disintegration in International Alliances: Comparative Studies* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1973), pp. 93-94.

make a new alliance roadmap with the United States, which will be another alliance transformation. That is, the two countries should discuss new common strategic objectives, followed by new military roles, missions and capabilities of the alliance.

First, the object of the threat perception of the ROK-U.S. alliance would be shifted from North Korea to regional and global entities. As the North Korea threat disappears, the alliance should focus on regional operation of the alliance. In this case, it is not clear whether the alliance should include China as a potential threat or not. Also, the two countries would determine their common strategic objectives. Regardless of China factor, the alliance's strategic objective will be to maintain regional peace and stability.

Second, the two countries should make a new alliance roadmap in the operational aspect. In this case, the size and allocation of the U.S. forces, strategic flexibility and military command structure will be major issues.

In the behavioral aspect, the new alliance roadmap should include military command structure, size and location of the U.S. forces in Korea (USFK), etc. On the military command structure, there would be no more need for the South Korean military to leave its wartime OPCON in the hands of the USFK. Recently, the U.S. and Korea agreed on the condition-based OPCON transfer. If the unification is achieved, there is no more North Korean threat. Along with the wartime OPCON transfer to the ROK military, the two countries would not feel the necessity to maintain the Combined Forces Command. The two countries' military command can maintain its separate command structure, as in the U.S.-Japan alliance, and they would only need a coordination or liaison center in preparation for the time of emergency. In this case, for the purpose of maintaining regional order and stability, the U.S. force's strategic flexibility would be an open policy option in order to cope with regional and global threats more swiftly.

Another important thing is the size and location of the USFK. Due to the change in the U.S. military strategy and the disappearance of the North Korean threat, the ground force size of the USFK will be decreased. Also, due to the Chinese opposition, it would be reasonable

not to deploy the USFK to the former North Korean territory. Only the unified Korean military would reside in the northern territory of the peninsula.

### ***The U.S. Interests and Concerns on the Korean Unification***

The U.S. interests in the unification of the Korean Peninsula would be as follows:<sup>23</sup>

- (1) The major U.S. interest in the peninsula is to remove or prevent the proliferation of WMD and long-range missiles. In a contingency situation, the U.S. concern is to prevent the North Korean WMD from spreading outside the Korean Peninsula. The unification would enable the prevention of the North Korean nuclear proliferation. That is, the unification contributes to the strengthening of the NPT regime.
- (2) The unification based on market economy would contribute to the U.S. economic interests. The former North Korean territory would need the U.S. investment, which would also be helpful for the U.S. economic interest.
- (3) The unification based on market economy and liberal democracy would work as a momentum for the United States to spread its major values globally.
- (4) The ROK-U.S. alliance after the unification would take new roles and missions, which maintains regional order and stability. The alliance would be a new asset for the U.S. rebalancing policy to Asia, and would contribute to maintaining the U.S. global hegemonic status.

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23. Robert Ellsworth, Andrew Goodpaster, and Rita Hauser, Co-Chairs, *America's National Interests: A Report from The Commission on America's National Interests* (Washington D.C.: Report for The Commission on America's National Interests, July 2000); U.S. Department of Defense, *A Strategic Framework for the Asia Pacific Rim: Report to Congress* (Washington D.C.: Department of State, 1992); CSIS Working Group, "A Blueprint for US Policy towards a Unified Korea," (CSIS Working Group Report, CSIS, August 2002); Peter Murphy Lewis, "U.S. Foreign Policy towards the Korean Peninsula: An Anti-Unification Policy or Just Too Many Uncertainties to Account For?" *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies* 16, no. 2 (2007); Cha Du Hyeogn, "An American Perspective on the Korean Unification: Opportunities and Challenges" (in Korean), *Journal of Global Politics* 3, no. 2 (2010), pp. 43-44.

- (5) As the all-out warfare situation disappears, the U.S. would not have a necessity to make OPLANs be prepared for it. Nowadays, the U.S. is shifting its defense strategy due to the defense budget decrease and sequestration. The two warfare strategies have disappeared in the 2012 defense strategic guidance. In this situation, the removal of the warfare situation in the peninsula would be a huge benefit to the United States.

Notwithstanding, there are several concerns of the United States about the unification. First, the United States is wary of the possible weakening of the ROK-U.S. alliance due to the unification. The unified Korea would need to think about a new security policy devoid of the North Korean threat, and the U.S. forces in Korea might have to be curtailed or withdrawn back to the United States considering the unified Korea's relationship with China.

Secondly, the possible weakening of the Korea-U.S. alliance would be detrimental to the current U.S. rebalancing policy towards Asia. Now the United States' rebalancing towards Asia is not implemented substantially due to the U.S. economic and budget situations. According to the 2014 QDR report, the U.S. is in the process of ending two wars, curtailing defense budget, and considering its Asia policy from the long-term perspective. That is, the United States plans to deploy 60 percent of its naval forces by 2020, and it expects much contribution from its allies in this region. In this respect, the possible weakening of the Korea-U.S. alliance after the Korean unification would be no little concern to the United States.

Third, the United States is concerned about the unified Korea taking a neutral status between the United States and China. This would invalidate the U.S. security provision and its nuclear umbrella to the Korean Peninsula which would make the unified Korea feel unstable in security terms. As has been the U.S. concerns during the German unification, the unified Korea might pursue its own independent military capabilities including nuclear capabilities.

## Conclusion: Policy Suggestions

Northeast Asian countries prefer status quo over the Korean unification. The United States is no exception. Nevertheless, the United States is more favorable to the unification than other neighboring countries. It is not because the U.S. interests in the Korean Peninsula do coalesce with those of two Koreas. It is rather because of the geographical reason. As the U.S. is situated far from the peninsula compared to other neighboring states, even though the unification is not a vital interest of the United States, the U.S. reservation on the unification is comparatively weaker than that of other states.<sup>24</sup>

Chinese position towards the unification is that it supports “peaceful, independent, incremental, and denuclearized unification.” It supports “peaceful” unification because it would be favorable to Chinese economic development, “independent” because the unified Korea should not lean to the United States, “incremental” because the unification should not hamper regional stability, and “denuclearized” because the unified Korea should abandon North Korea’s nuclear weapons and should also not depend on the U.S. nuclear umbrella. In sum, China opposes pro-U.S. unification of the Korean Peninsula.

This requires the Korean government to get prepared for the unification discreetly. First, the North-South relationship should focus on the unification process. Germany has been bound by the Potsdam agreement in which France, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and the United States agreed upon the military occupation and reconstruction of Germany. Later, this agreement was superseded by the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany (the two plus four agreement) in which the Four Powers renounced all rights they held in Germany and allowed a united Germany to become fully sovereign. There needed four countries’ approvals for the German unification. However, Korea is not bound by any treaty that prevents the unification. If the two Koreas agree upon the unification process, neighboring countries have no options but to agree on it.

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24. Lewis, “U.S. Foreign Policy toward the Korean Peninsula,” p. 107.

In regard to this, Victor Cha mentioned:

The major powers ... simply prefer the known status quo to an unknown and potentially destabilizing future. ... Nevertheless, were the two Koreas to begin a process of unification tomorrow, it would be wholly within the interests of the major powers to support it without prevarication. This is so because any actions to the contrary would risk making an enemy of the newly united and more powerful Korea. Thus, while the impetus for changing the status quo is not likely to come from the major powers, Koreans can be assured that once they start the process themselves the external powers would be obliged to support it, not out of affinity, good will, or loyalty, but because it is in their respective interests to do so.<sup>25</sup>

Second, a more assertive policy towards unification should be chosen over a peaceful management of the divided country. A peace treaty is needed to terminate the armistice of the Korean War, but not an indispensable requisite for the unification. A peace treaty also incurs a lot of expenses. That is, North Korea has been demanding the withdrawal of the USFK in order to conclude a peace treaty, which is not easy under the current security situation.

Even though six parties have agreed that they would discuss further on how to conclude a peace treaty, it is not an easy process because the parties have different positions and interests. The United States' position is that there should be the North Korean denuclearization before concluding a peace treaty. The Chinese position is that once a peace treaty is concluded then all other problems including denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula would be solved. Thus, rather than sticking to an unproductive debate on a peace treaty, a more active unification policy should be undertaken.

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25. Victor Cha, "The Continuity behind the Change in Korea," *Orbis* 44, no. 4 (2000), pp. 591-592.

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## **North Korea's Evolving Nuclear Strategy under the Pretext of Minimum Deterrence: Implications for the Korean Peninsula**

**Zafar Khan**

Little is known about North Korea's nuclear strategy. It is shrouded with greater ambiguity, which plays a central role in its nuclear weapons program. In the absence of North Korea's policy document and institutionalization of its nuclear policy, it is not clear what nuclear strategy North Korea would opt for and why. Therefore, one expects many speculative interpretations on the evolving nuclear strategy of North Korea. This article attempts to predict under the conceptual essentials of minimum deterrence that North Korea would follow minimum deterrence. But under the pretext of minimum deterrence, it would have multiple options to opt for one or more types of nuclear strategies. However, each of these nuclear strategies would have strategic implications for North Korea in general and the Korean Peninsula in particular.

**Keywords:** North Korea, essentials of minimum deterrence, nuclear strategy, ROK-U.S., Korean Peninsula

### **Introduction**

Along with a factor of regime survival, North Korea went nuclear to deter the security threats Pyongyang thinks emanate from the U.S. and its nuclear security guarantee to South Korea. Security factor for North Korea going nuclear remains a predominant factor. In the early 1950s, Kim Il-sung stated, "Although the U.S. is threatening our country with nuclear bombs, it does not affect our people's will to fight the U.S. for retaining freedom and independence."<sup>1</sup> Pyongyang

also considers the U.S. nuclear umbrella over South Korea a nuclear threat.<sup>2</sup> In addition to this, the 2002 U.S. Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) clearly indicated North Korea as an “axis of evil” along with Iran and Iraq, which gave the U.S. a pretext for preemptive strikes. These instances indicate that North Korea perceived a serious security threat, which motivated Pyongyang to develop nuclear weapons.

It has been more than two decades that North Korea nuclear drama has persisted. In the early 1990s, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) threatened to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to address their self-proclaimed “legitimate self-defense measure.”<sup>3</sup> North Korea withdrew from the NPT in 2003 indicating that it had already given a three-month advanced notice a decade before, and putting a greater pressure on the non-proliferation regime. This remains a challenge for the NPT observing North Korea quitting the NPT without a particular mechanism for punishment, which in turn shows the weakness within the existing structure of the NPT despite its life-time extension in 1995 and increasing membership up to 190 countries. The U.S. and other major parties to the NPT and the six-party talks failed to stop North Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons capability, which North Korea tested in 2006, 2009 and 2013.

In addition to these successful nuclear tests, North Korea also plans to increase the number of nuclear weapons. With the increased number of nuclear weapons, North Korea would require to test various combinations of delivery systems, which could include short, medium, and long range missiles. North Korea claims to have acquired missile capabilities that could not only hit the U.S. bases in the East Asian region, but could also threaten to hit U.S. homeland. Besides these

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1. Kim Il-sung, “Report for the 6th Anniversary for the Liberation (August 14, 1951),” *Kim Jong-il Seonjip* [Kim Il-sung Works], vol. 6 (Pyongyang: Workers Party of Korea Publishing, 1980), p. 429.
  2. Kwon Hyuk-chul, “Paradox of Extended Deterrence,” *The Hankyoreh*, June 17, 2009.
  3. “Statement of DPRK Government on Its withdrawal from NPT,” Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), January 10, 2003.

strategic force developments, the DPRK is rapidly obtaining other deterrence capabilities such as the KN-08 Transporter Erector Launcher, anti-ship cruise missile modeled on the Russian KH-35 Uran, the Rodong mid-range ballistic missiles build on scud technology, deterrence force miniaturization, submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) for a second strike capability, inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) and cyber technology.<sup>4</sup>

Although the DPRK is in the embryonic stages of its strategic force development program, the deterrence force acquisition seems rapid and assertive. North Korean acquisition of nuclear weapons along with its increasing missile capabilities could have greater security implications on the Korean Peninsula. As the DPRK continues to threaten to use nuclear weapons, the Korean Peninsula remains a nuclear "flash-point."<sup>5</sup> Both the U.S. and its close ally, the Republic of Korea (ROK), are expected to understand the evolving nuclear strategy of the DPRK in order to prevent the nuclear Armageddon. On the one hand, it is important to understand what kind of nuclear strategy the DPRK would opt for and why, but on the other hand, it is equally essential to understand its broad-based nuclear policy after its nuclear weapons tests to better comprehend the DPRK's nuclear related issues and the challenges they may pose to the security and strategic stability of the Korean Peninsula.

The DPRK's nuclear strategy is deeply shrouded by ambiguity. There is no North Korean official documentation that substantially explains its nuclear policy. It is not clear: whether or not the DPRK would opt for minimum deterrence by keeping its strategic forces small; whether these deterrence forces would be used for political or military purposes; how, where and when they could use nuclear

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4. Richard Weitz, "The South Korean-U.S. Nuclear Alliance: Steadfast and Changing," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 27, no. 3 (2015), pp. 401-402.

5. The U.S. President Bill Clinton used the phrase "nuclear flash point" in 2000 during in the context of India-Pakistan inter-state strategic rivalry over the Kashmir issue after the nuclear weapons tests in 1998. See, Jubith Miller and James Risen, "A Nuclear War Feared Possible over Kashmir," *The New York Times*, August 8, 2000.

weapons; whether they opt for the first use (FU) or no-first use (NFU) doctrinal option; what would be their deterrence operational force posture — that is, will the DPRK choose counter-value or counter-force targeting; will they rely on the third party role at the time of conflict or they could increase overreliance on their own nuclear weapons; and whether these deterrence forces are for defensive purposes or they could be deployed forward for offensive strategy. These are some of the important conceptual and structural ingredients with regard to broader contours of nuclear strategy a nuclear weapons state needs to strategize in order to prevent accidental or inadvertent use of nuclear weapons.

Despite the DPRK's open testing of three nuclear weapons in three different years, there is an absence of substantial clarity on its nuclear strategy. It may not be wrong to presume that the DPRK does have nuclear strategy. Despite the level of ambiguity it encompasses when it comes to its evolving nuclear strategy, it does not mean the DPRK would not have a command and control system or strategy for its deterrence forces. The Waltzian logic on the developing states is that these states in possession of nuclear weapons would be rational and responsible towards taking good care of their weapons preventing them from either falling into the wrong hands or being accidentally used during the conflict given the nuclear learning from the predecessors during the classic nuclear age between the Soviet Union (Russia) and the U.S. However, the Saganian conceptual logic casts quite a pessimistic picture that these developing states in possession of nuclear weapons may not be rational and responsible and there exists a danger of the nuclear weapons use during both peace and conflict time.<sup>6</sup> This unending debate continues.

Until the DPRK officially declares its nuclear policy substantially, the contemporary scholarship would have different interpretations on its nuclear strategy. Some would argue that it acquired nuclear

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6. For interesting analysis on this unwinnable debate see, Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003).

weapons for the protection of the regime; others may presume that North Korea would strategize to use its nuclear weapons for blackmailing purposes and materialize them as a bargaining chip for diplomatic and economic gains; still, others would state that the DPRK could opt for a *catalytic* nuclear strategy in which it could enjoy the third party patronage to resolve the issue because of the fear of the use of nuclear weapons and/or it could opt for an *asymmetric* nuclear strategy where North Korea due to increasing conventional force asymmetry between the DPRK and ROK-U.S. could possibly opt for a first use doctrinal posture to deter the conventional stronger side. Each of these possible options for nuclear strategy would have their own strategic implications for the Korean Peninsula. None of these essential readings have tested the theoretical framework on the essentials of minimum deterrence that could predict well the DPRK's evolving nuclear strategy.

All these proposed nuclear strategies could fall within the broader contours of minimum deterrence the DPRK might declare as its nuclear policy to be. Based on these essential readings, this article goes beyond and predicts that the DPRK would follow minimum deterrence. However, the North Korean regime may not define what minimum would stand for, how many it would need, and how many it could suffice for its security purposes. Under the pretext of minimum deterrence, the DPRK would increase its deterrence forces and make its deterrence much more broad based, pretending to meet the challenges of changed security environment. The DPRK's evolving nuclear strategy under the minimum deterrence would still remain ambiguous, which in turn would bring security challenges for the Korean Peninsula. To understand North Korea's evolving nuclear strategy under the pretext of minimum deterrence, it is important to revisit the conceptual essentials of minimum deterrence the North Koreans might look and opt for.

## Essentials of Minimum Deterrence<sup>7</sup>

The concept of minimum deterrence was developed during the Cold War period when on the one hand, the U.S. and the former Soviet Union/Russia were rapidly expanding their deterrent forces to inflict unacceptable damage against each other, but on the other hand, the world of critics established an idea of minimum which revolves around a few survivable nuclear forces.<sup>8</sup> These lowest numbers of nuclear forces could inflict unacceptable damage. Few went further to note that the use of one nuclear weapon could be unacceptable to the adversary. The minimum provided an idea that the adversary's attacks could be prevented with the fewest number of nuclear weapons possible. In other words, minimum could deter and there was absolutely no need for building more. Indeed, force structure build-ups, the operationalization and declaratory policy orientation of deterrent forces are required at the minimum level. Minimum deterrence is a complex conceptual phenomenon. The minimum based on "the lowest level of damage ... with the fewest number of nuclear weapons"<sup>9</sup> permits a number of interpretations regarding the precise nature of that particular level of damage and/or number of warheads. A long-forgotten concept of minimum deterrence existed

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7. For interesting and detailed account on essentials of minimum deterrence, see, Rajesh Basrur, *Minimum Deterrence and India's Nuclear Security* (California: Stanford University Press, 2006); also, see, Zafar Khan, *Pakistan's Nuclear Policy: A Minimum Credible Deterrence* (London: Routledge, 2015).

8. For interesting account on this perspective, see, Patrick Blackett, "A Critique of Defence Thinking," *Survival* 3, no. 3 (1961), pp. 126-134; Patrick Blackett, *Studies of War: Nuclear and Conventional* (London: Oliver & Boyd Publications, 1962); Anthony Buzzard, "Massive Retaliation and Graduated Deterrence," *World Politics* 8, no. 2 (1956), pp. 228-237; Anthony Buzzard, "Defence, Disarmament and Christian Decision," *Survival* 3, no. 5 (1961), pp. 207-219; Anthony Buzzard, John Slessor, and Richard Lowenthal, "The H-Bomb: Massive Retaliation or Graduated Deterrence," *International Affairs* 32, no. 2 (1956), pp. 148-165.

9. Peter Gizewski, *Minimum Nuclear Deterrence in a New World Order*, Aurora Papers 24 (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Global Security, 1994), p. 2.

in the U.S. during the early stages of the Cold War when the U.S. Navy claimed to destroy "all of Russia" with 45 submarines and 720 warheads<sup>10</sup> and this may still be interpreted as minimum compared with the hundreds and thousands built in the later phases of the Cold War. British, French, and Chinese notions of minimum deterrence remain modest.<sup>11</sup> Both India and Pakistan also officially declare credible minimum deterrence. Despite the simplicity of the term minimum deterrence, these nuclear states find it hard to define what it means by minimum. Given the complexity, how best can the basics of minimum explain the minimum deterrence?

First, after the use of nuclear weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nuclear weapons states learnt a lesson from the military use of nuclear weapons. Given the destructive characteristics of nuclear weapons, it was decided that these are other types of weapons and they must never be used militarily in the event of a crisis. Therefore, the political aspect was prioritized which supports the minimalist nature of deterrence to achieve the political objectives. The political aspect entails: the less the deterrent forces and the less we rely on them, the better.

Second, the idea behind a political priority of deterrent forces was that these forces could cause an unacceptable destruction. Risk is the starting point in elaborating the basics of minimum deterrence, which remains central to nuclear deterrence. The fear and risk of the nuclear weapons use deter the adversary from starting a war. At the minimalist level, risk centrally focuses on the idea that there is no "probability of victory" and rather the adversaries may confront the "possibility of annihilation." Minimum highlights that risk is associated with the use of nuclear weapons and it would cause more damage than create benefit. Central to fear and risk of the nuclear weapons use, states are deterred from waging a war. Risk and the fear associated

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10. Ibid, pp. 2-3.

11. Avery Goldstein, *Deterrence and Security in the 21st Century: China, Britain, France, and the Enduring Legacy of the Nuclear Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); John C. Hopkins and Hu Weixing eds., *Strategic Views from the Second Tier: The Nuclear Weapons Policies of France, Britain, and China* (London: New Brunswick, 1995).

with the nuclear weapons use have a close link with the “existential deterrence” where the mere existence of nuclear weapons could deter the adversary from waging a war in the first place.

Third, if risk is the starting point to elaborate the basics of minimum deterrence, then a few, not more, are enough to deter. The phenomenon associated with the “few” or “small” deterrent forces can be interpreted as that few can deter. Powerful nuclear weapon states with bigger and sophisticated delivery systems have been deterred by smaller nuclear weapon states. The U.S. in the Cuban Missile crisis in 1962 and the former Soviet Union (now Russia) in the Sino-Soviet border conflict were deterred by small nuclear forces.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the smaller numbers of nuclear forces of Pakistan and India deterred each other from waging a full-scale war during both the Kargil crisis in 1999 and the 2001-2002 border confrontation.<sup>13</sup>

Fourth, although the Cold War-type deterrence was based on bigger sizes, technological sophistication, and greater number, these are discouraged at the minimalist level. Since it is viewed that nuclear weapons are not used for war-fighting purposes and, therefore, should not be militarily prioritized, bigger sizes and expensive technological sophistication are discouraged by the basics of minimum deterrence. The bigger sizes and larger number of deterrent forces matter little at the minimalist level, but the survivability of a small number of forces can be deterring which may help build a second-strike capability in an exchange for a Triad (strategic bombers, ICBMs, and SLBMs). The bigger sizes and large number of nuclear forces encourage arms competition between the two adversaries and create difficulty in the command and control posture. The smaller the nuclear weapons, the easier they can be hidden, and the quicker it can be assembled if it absolutely needed to ensure the credibility of

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12. Rajesh Rajagopalan, *Second Strike: Arguments about Nuclear War in South Asia* (New Delhi: Viking, 2005), pp. 89-106.

13. Rajesh Basrur, *Minimum Deterrence and India's Nuclear Security*; Rajesh Basrur, “Nuclear Deterrence Thinking in Pakistan,” in *International Relations Theory and South Asia*, vol. II, E. Sridharan (ed.) (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 107.

nuclear deterrence. The bigger the sizes of deterrent forces, the harder the command and control system would be, and the more difficult it becomes to conceal and disperse.

Fifth, minimum deterrence requires, recalling the always/never taxonomy, that deterrent forces should never be used when they are not needed and should always be under the command and instructions of the political leaders when absolutely needed in order to induce the credibility and survivability of nuclear weapons from an accidental use of nuclear weapons. However, the essence of minimum deterrence prioritizes the political aspect of nuclear deterrence. It encourages the dispersal and concealment of nuclear forces. The deployment at the forward-edged position is discouraged which permits the risk of pre-delegation and force protection. Delegation of launch authority is critiqued. Minimum deterrence encourages a centralized command and control to avoid these worries of deterrent forces. Minimum also urges that deterrent forces be kept at the disassembled state to avert the misuse of nuclear weapons.

Sixth, the essence of minimum deterrence urges the arms control and disarmament process to reduce the danger of arms race and the possibility of nuclear weapons use. At the minimalist level, the process of arms control and disarmament discourages the salience of nuclear weapons and helps reduce the risk of military escalation to the nuclear level.

In summary, minimum deterrence requires little to deter. A few survivable numbers of deterrent forces have deterred states with bigger number and larger and sophisticated delivery sizes during the Cold War period. There is no reason why it may not deter in the present era. The mere existence and the centrality of the risk and fear associated with the nuclear weapons use induce the credibility and prioritize the political and psychological prospect of deterrent forces. This brief theoretical explanation helps elaborate whether or not the presumed DPRK's policy of minimum deterrence, if it chooses to do so, and its salient features bolstered with the strategic force increase are consistent with minimum deterrence conceived in this article. Under this conceptual theoretical framework, it examines North Korea's emerging

strategic force architecture and its consistency with the minimum deterrence conceptualized in this article. The following section examines various deterrence policy options available for the DPRK, and amongst these policies options it attempts to find out what North Korea would opt for and why.

### **Deterrence Policy Options for North Korea**

There are various deterrence policy options North Korea might opt for, which in turn would assist its doctrinal posture it chooses. It may vary from one particular strategic situation to another depending on where the North Koreans find themselves. North Korea could adopt the flexible approach — that is, opting for either one or multiple deterrence policy choices to meet its strategic and political goals. It would be interesting to observe closely as to what policy options the North Korean would opt for and why. More research work need to elaborate further on this aspect, but ambiguity would rule within these possible options and each one would have strategic implications for the East Asian region in general and the Korean Peninsula in particular.

#### ***Deterrence via Assured Destruction***

This particular deterrence option remains very expensive and expansive for North Korea given its lack of technological wherewithal and staggering economic condition. It would require a bigger and larger number of strategic, conventional, and tactical forces that would put extreme pressure on the DPRK's command and control mechanism and leadership. It would require many personnel loyal to the DPRK's leadership; it would demand many delivery systems; it could provide incentive for a first strike capability to an immature Pyongyang's nuclear leadership which in turn could increase the risk of an accidental use of nuclear weapons; and it could endanger the DPRK's regime survival as lots of public funds could then be diverted for the maintenance

of North Korea's enlarging strategic forces with many delivery systems. Only two states during the peak of the Cold War (i.e., the Soviet Union and the U.S.) possessed the technological and economic capacity to uphold such a deterrence policy option, but later they started to realize that it was a mad and unnecessary "overkill" strategy with which no power could win and/or sustain forever. The strategy based on mutual assured destruction turned to a dead end of nuclear strategy during the Cold War era.<sup>14</sup> Given all these risks associated with this policy option, North Korea would not possibly opt for this kind of overkill strategy which could result in a spillover on its deterrence forces.

### **Limited Deterrence**

North Korea could opt for this policy option, as this remains "affordable," but it would still cost North Korea a lot, given the poor economic condition, economic sanctions and lack of technological advancement. China may be considered a classic case in practice of limited deterrence.<sup>15</sup> Limited deterrence would "require sufficient counterforce and counter-value tactical, theatre, and strategic nuclear forces to deter the escalation of conventional or nuclear war. If deterrence fails, this capability should be sufficient to control escalation and to compel the enemy to back down."<sup>16</sup> This may be termed as a restricted version of assured destruction that tends toward the sufficiency of deterrence forces covering all essential areas of force structure.<sup>17</sup> However, the operationalization of this deterrence concept may require some configuration of ballistic missile defense system and effective space-based early warning capabilities.<sup>18</sup> North Korea in the embryonic stages

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14. Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* (London: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 331-334.

15. Alastair Iain Johnston, "China's New Old Thinking: the Concept of Limited Deterrence," *International Security* 20, no. 3 (1995/1996), pp. 5-42.

16. *Ibid.*, p.1.

17. Basrur, *Minimum Deterrence and India's Nuclear Security*, pp. 26-27.

18. Johnston, "China's New Old Thinking," p. 20.

may acquire some of these strategic forces. However, it has not yet obtained other sophisticated deterrence force capabilities the Chinese could have already developed. Idealistically, this policy option might be affordable for the North Koreans, but Pyongyang may not opt for this at its initial stages of nuclear development program.

### ***Virtual Deterrence***

North Korea may no longer fall in this type of deterrence as it has already acquired nuclear weapons capability and tested this capability by conducting three nuclear weapons tests. However, North Korea could have practiced this type of deterrence in the early 2000s when it could have achieved nuclear capability, but was not ready to test. Both recessed and non-weaponized deterrence fall within the ambit of virtual deterrence — that is, state either has acquired nuclear weapons and/or has the technological and economic capacity to acquire nuclear weapons quickly, but there is an absence of nuclear weapons tests. Both India and Pakistan practiced virtual nuclear deterrence in the 1980s. Japan is a classic example as a state in practice of virtual deterrence because it has the economic and technological wherewithal to acquire nuclear weapons quickly.

### ***Opaque Deterrence***

Under this particular policy of deterrence, state does not officially declare that it possesses and deploys nuclear weapons even though it could have already achieved the nuclear capability. In this type of deterrence, state does not announce that it has nuclear weapons; it does not deploy its nuclear weapons; it does not test; and it does not declare any official statement on the possession of deterrence forces. Things remain shrouded deep in secrecy with no public debate on the deterrence forces. Israel is a classic example in practice of nuclear opacity.<sup>19</sup> Although North Korea has already tested its nuclear

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19. See, Bradley A. Thayer, "The Causes of Nuclear Proliferation and the Utility

weapons capability and many ingredients with regard to its nuclear strategy are not yet clear, it no longer stays in opaque deterrence. In other words, North Korea is no longer an opaque nuclear weapon state despite the greater and increasing amount of ambiguity around its nuclear weapons program and the policy it could opt for.

### **Primary Deterrence**

Primary deterrence is a policy option where a nuclear weapons state protects its own homeland by projecting its deterrence power capabilities. It is different from the extended deterrence the U.S. largely practiced and is still practicing to deter the aggressions of other adversaries by means of protecting its allies and partners. However, many in Europe questioned the nuclear guarantee under the banner of extended deterrence whether or not the U.S. could sacrifice Washington or California for London or Paris. Therefore, both France and Britain went nuclear to avert their suspicion of nuclear umbrella erected on them. Each nuclear weapons state basically practices primary deterrence. North Korea is a state in practice of primary deterrence believing that its nuclear weapons could protect Pyongyang's political regime. Based on this assumption, Pyongyang could use nuclear weapons if it is attacked.<sup>20</sup>

### **Minimum Deterrence**

The concept of this policy option existed during the peak of the Cold War where on the one hand, both the Soviet Union (Russia) and the

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of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime," *Security Studies* 4, no. 3 (1995), pp. 463-519; Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

20. For interesting analysis on this see, Terence Roehrig, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Program: Motivations, Strategy and Doctrine," in *Strategy in the Second Nuclear Age: Power, Ambition, and the Ultimate Weapon*, Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes (eds.) (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2012), pp. 81-98.

U.S. acquired a number of nuclear forces along with sophisticated delivery systems, but on the other hand, the critics provided an alternative policy option, which was to propose minimum deterrence that could have deterring effects, too. It is observed if few could deter, why to go for more. China, France, and Britain follow the modest number of deterrence forces. India and Pakistan also practice minimum deterrence and they elaborate through their official statements every now and then that they practice minimum deterrence. Also, both the U.S. and Russia have long been getting away from the Cold War mad race in terms of reducing their numbers. But the minimum deterrence and/or the modest number of each powerful nuclear weapons state may not be applicable, say, on South Asia. The minimum practiced by one state may differ from the minimum practiced by other state. The language of minimum is simple, but the treatment is complex. Although there is no substantial official declaration that North Korea practices minimum deterrence, it can be observed that North Korea possesses a modest number of deterrence forces. North Korea may claim to follow minimum deterrence,<sup>21</sup> but under the pretext of minimum deterrence it could keep bigger ambiguity and complexity by going for more nuclear weapons, conventional forces and low-yield nuclear weapons bolstered with various types of delivery systems, which in turn could change the contours of minimum deterrence in the East Asian region.

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21. The word minimum is very simple to pronounce, but it gets complex when a scholarship is required to define the term. The treatment of the minimum may differ from one nuclear weapons state to another. However, the more one gets for a definition, the more complex it becomes to define and the harder it becomes to understand the language of minimum. The least possible answer to this could be that minimum does not remain fixed; it is not a fixed entity; it is an open and flexible term; and it changes in accordance with the changed strategic environment.

## **The Pretext of Minimum Deterrence**

Amongst many deterrence policy options available to North Korea, It could follow minimum deterrence as a broader contour of its nuclear policy, though ambiguity would play a central role within this and the North Korean security establishment could never define the parameters of minimum deterrence nor they could be able to treat the language of minimum well.

The best conceptual interpretation the DPRK could have regarding the concept of minimum deterrence would be: 1) minimum deters. Minimum is better. Minimum is safer; 2) Also, minimum does not remain static; 3) it is not a fixed term; 4) it changes in accordance with the changed strategic circumstances; 4) today's minimum, may not be the minimum for tomorrow; 5) the minimum deterrence forces vary from one nuclear weapons state to another depending on the threat perception one carries; 6) the minimum one holds could be affected by the minimum of other. In other words, it may be directly proportional to what the other side is strategizing and why; and 7) the concept of minimum, though simple, cannot tell how much is enough and why many more within the imperatives of minimum may be needed to survive and sustain the credibility of deterrent forces.

North Korea's policy option of minimum deterrence would be vague, ambiguous and complex. Nevertheless, North Korea could then have multiple options to practice nuclear strategy within the broader contours of minimum deterrence. The following section will have a look at various alternative options North Korea might adopt under the broader context of minimum deterrence and find out whether or not each of these nuclear strategies would remain consistent with the essentials of minimum deterrence perceived here.

## **Alternative Nuclear Strategies under the Minimum Deterrence**

Nuclear weapons states adopt various combinations of nuclear strategies in accordance with the changed strategic environment. During the Cold War period, the U.S. adopted a series of alternative nuclear strategies such as massive retaliation and flexible response from time to time, though the central theme of deterrence remained intact. Other smaller nuclear weapons states practiced various sets of nuclear strategies depending on the strategic circumstances they lived in.

As part of nuclear learning, North Korea may not necessarily adopt any single form of nuclear strategy, but it could have more than one set of nuclear strategy to begin with. However, the basic ingredients of these nuclear strategies could stay the same. For example, North Korea might pose its nuclear weapons for war-fighting/military purposes (offensive strategy) pretending itself to be a mad country that could threaten to use nuclear weapons at any time with means of its own choice, but it could revert and use its nuclear weapons for political purposes (defensive strategy) without endangering the strategic stability of the Korean Peninsula. The types of nuclear strategies North Korea might adopt depend much on the strategic environment. These could be concessionary nuclear strategy, catalytic strategy, asymmetric strategy, and strategy based on assured retaliation. However, each one could have its own strategic repercussions for North Korea.

### ***Concessionary Nuclear Strategy***

In a severe economic crisis, with Russian and Chinese no longer interested in providing a greater economic assistance the way the DPRK could expect, the increase of military muscles and desire for the acquisition of nuclear weapons would prove to be a political tool kit for the North Korean regime for its masses to gain domestic concession, which in turn would aim at survival of the DPRK's political regime. The concessionary strategy associated with the acquisition of nuclear

weapons at the domestic front is to please and satisfy the masses with the power-muscles of nuclear weapons. The message to the North Koreans was clear that nuclear weapons would protect them from a complete disaster, though they could starve and not eat three times a day. Ultimately, the strategy at the domestic level was to ensure the survivability of the regime.<sup>22</sup>

Given the success of concessionary nuclear strategy at the domestic level, the DPRK's nuclear leadership would materialize the similar type of strategy at the regional level to seek economic benefits. After North Korea's nuclear weapons tests, the trade volume and maximum economic trade attraction between the rival Korean states have further increased from USD 140.5 million in 2008 to USD 165.6 million in 2010.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, North Korea would craft a concessionary nuclear strategy to extract food, aid and energy requirements for its starving masses that have already suffered because of the international economic sanctions.<sup>24</sup> Despite the economic sanctions by the U.S., the humanitarian assistance continues to flow. North Korea successfully attracts the humanitarian aid from both the U.S. and South Korea despite North Korea going nuclear. This trade volume tends to increase up to USD 14 million. Besides, North Korea also seeks energy assistance from countries such as Russia, China, Japan, South Korea and the U.S.<sup>25</sup> North Korea would show its madness and present bellicose rhetoric to use nuclear weapons against South Korea. While using nuclear weapons as a bargaining chip, North Korea has become quite successful in this type of strategy extracting economic assistance for its masses and regime survival. As long as this strategy works, North Korea would continue to act madly without necessarily using its

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22. See, Ahn Mun Suk, "What is the Root Cause of the North Korean Nuclear Program," *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 38, no. 4 (2011), pp. 175-187.

23. See, Lee Dong Sun, "Causes of North Korean Belligerence," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 66, no. 2 (2012), p. 114.

24. For a brief, but crisp account see, "In focus: North Korea's Nuclear Threats," *The New York Times*, April 16, 2013.

25. See, Mark E. Manyin and Mary Beth D. Nikitin, "Foreign Assistance to North Korea," (Congressional Research Service, April 2, 2014), pp. 3-6.

nuclear weapons. For success of this strategy, someone has to listen to the North Koreans in terms of meeting its economic demands. To make someone listen to North Korea for concessionary purposes as part of its nuclear strategy, North Korea would communicate and deliver the message clearly across the Korean Peninsula that it would either conduct missile test-fires or go for another nuclear test.

In addition, North Korea would use its nuclear weapons as a bargaining chip to strategically negotiate with the U.S. The DPRK would demand of the U.S. to disengage its security commitment in North-east Asia; remove its nuclear umbrella from South Korea; withdraw its military forces from the Korean Peninsula; and develop a U.S.-DPRK strategic relationship to the level of the ROK-U.S. alliance.<sup>26</sup> Also, North Korea would demand the light water nuclear reactors as part of the DPRK's concessionary strategy. The ROK-U.S. would have two options. One, they could ignore what the North Koreans signal. Second, they could put severe economic sanctions and encourage China to play its diplomatic and political role in prohibiting North Korea from conducting more missile and nuclear tests. China has recently stated that it would put economic sanctions if North Korea conducts another missile and/or nuclear weapons test.<sup>27</sup>

Although China is considered a close ally of the DPRK, China could play an important role for two important reasons: one, it does not desire a conflict at the Korean Peninsula which in turn could threaten its own economic and security interests. Second, being a rising regional economic power and as an essential part of the six-party talks towards Korean nuclear issue, the international community would expect China to keep a closer eye on North Korea's assertiveness and deter North Korea from initiating a conflict. Concessionary nuclear strategy may provide North Korea with short-term economic and political benefits, but it can prove to be dangerous in the long term as

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26. For an interesting piece on this perspective see, Jonathan D. Pollack, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Development: Implications for Future Policy," (Proliferation Paper, Security Studies Center, Spring 2010).

27. See, Christopher Bodeen, "China to Respond Firmly to Any North Korea Nuclear Test," *Army Times*, September 18, 2015.

the major powers may get weary of North Korea's insane strategy and provide no more concessions. Its failure could cause the DPRK's over-reliance on the third party intervention, which Vipin Narang names "catalytic nuclear strategy."<sup>28</sup> However, this type of nuclear strategy has got implications for North Korea.

### **Catalytic Nuclear Strategy**

Catalytic nuclear strategy would require a third party intervention in order to avert a nuclear crisis and meet the demands of the states practicing this type of strategy. A nuclear weapons state practicing catalytic strategy would threaten to use its nuclear weapons against the adversary in order to draw the attention of the third party whose interest in that particular region is sufficiently very high, and who, in turn, would desire the effect of de-escalation.<sup>29</sup> A third party with greater economic and strategic interests is likely to intervene to de-escalate the crisis. It may be argued that a state practicing catalytic nuclear strategy might never gamble if it were sure that the third party would not intervene. Arguably, the state practicing this type of strategy believes that the third party's stake in the region is high and it would intervene timely to avert the crisis designed for economic and political purposes. Narang's thesis identifies at least three states that practiced catalytic strategy — that is, South Africa and Pakistan during the 1980s and Israel from 1967 through to 1991.<sup>30</sup>

This type of nuclear strategy remains consistent with the minimum deterrence, as this does not require a greater number of nuclear forces along with the sophisticated delivery systems. Few nuclear weapons would suffice to attract the third party attention to the crisis because of the fear of a conflict transforming to nuclear escalation.<sup>31</sup>

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28. Vipin Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era: Regional Powers and International Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 13-54.

29. For interesting analysis on this see, Vipin Narang, "Nuclear Strategies of Emerging Nuclear Powers: North Korea and Iran," *Washington Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (2015), pp. 75-77.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

North Korea has practiced this type of strategy in terms of materializing the Chinese patronage to intervene, believing that nuclear escalation would not be in the security and economic interest of China and that China would intervene to assist the DPRK in staying alive. Narang states, "One possible North Korea strategy, therefore, is the catalytic posture, whereby it employs the threat of further nuclear breakout to ensure the patronage of Beijing against (particularly) the United States."<sup>32</sup> While playing out the catalytic nuclear strategy, North Korea secures high confidence against the stronger opposition in the form of ROK-U.S. alliance. North Korea keeps a strong belief that "catalytic strategy is necessary to ensure Beijing protects it — at least diplomatically — against the United States."<sup>33</sup> China intervened and urged both the ROK-U.S. and North Korea to show restraint after the *Cheonan* and Yeonpyeong incidents.<sup>34</sup> However, there is no guarantee that the third party would make a timely intervention to the interest of North Korea and the absence of the assured patronage intervention at the time of crisis would make this strategy risky. This could increase the chances of inadvertent use of nuclear weapons.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, China, because of its own security dilemma, could warn Pyongyang not to carry out *Cheonan*- and Yeonpyeong-like adventurism, which could have spillover effects on China.<sup>36</sup>

Since minimum deterrence does not remain consistent and fixed, North Korea practicing catalytic nuclear strategy consistent with the minimum deterrence may not consider this type of nuclear strategy a fixed entity. It could change depending on the patronage mode of relationship. First, as long as North Korea remains successful in

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31. Shane Smith, "North Korea's Evolving Nuclear Strategy," (US-Korea Institute at SAIS, August 2015).

32. Narang, "Nuclear Strategies of Emerging Nuclear Powers," p. 84.

33. Ibid. p. 84.

34. Nam Jong-ho, Choo Jae-woo, and Lee Jang-won, "China's Dilemma on the Korean Peninsula: Not an Alliance but a Security Dilemma," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 25, no. 3 (2013), p. 391.

35. See, Paul Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrence: Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

36. Nam, Choo, and Lee, "China's Dilemma on the Korean Peninsula," p. 395.

ensuring the Chinese patronage during the crisis for its economic and political gains, the DPRK's may not go for more nuclear weapons and missile tests. Second, the Chinese abandonment of North Koreans could encourage the DPRK to increase its deterrence forces bolstered with sophisticated delivery systems, which in turn would cause greater security implications on the Korean Peninsula. Therefore, the U.S. would desire China to play a significant role in terms of putting strategic pressure on North Korea to show restraint.<sup>37</sup> The current intention of North Korea for more nuclear weapons test and plans for acquiring sophisticated delivery systems such as ICBMs, nuclear submarine, and miniaturization of nuclear weapons indicate a shift in North Korea's nuclear strategy, which would drive it for first use of nuclear weapons (over reliance on deterrence forces) Narang calls the "asymmetric escalation." Adopting this type of strategy would make North Korea more aggressive against the ROK-U.S. conventionally stronger side and this would make Korean Peninsula scarier. Will North Korea opt for an asymmetric strategy willing to use its nuclear weapons first in the early stages of war?

### ***Asymmetric Nuclear Strategy***

Nuclear weapons states adopt this type of nuclear strategy to offset the conventional superiority of the adversary in terms of using their nuclear weapons first. It is basically to avert the conventional imbalance with the increasing reliance on nuclear weapons. Being frustrated by the sheer absence of the third party patronage, North Korea could adopt the asymmetric strategy to be the first to use nuclear weapons. North Korea could become more assertive when this type of strategy would make North Korea rely on nuclear weapons use as a war-fighting instrument.<sup>38</sup> North Korea has already expressed that it

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37. "North Korea: U.S. Urges China to Help End Crisis," *The Sky News*, April 14, 2013.

38. For a speculative but interesting analysis see, Peter Hayes and Roger Cavazos, "North Korea's Nuclear Force Roadmap: Hard Choices" (Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability, March 2015).

would not only go for more nuclear and missile tests, but also use them if necessary to deter the U.S. In March 2015, DPRK Foreign Minister Ri Su-yong declared that Pyongyang has the capability to deter the “ever increasing nuclear threats” of the U.S.<sup>39</sup> Also, in September 2015, the director of North Korea’s Atomic Energy Institute said the country was ready to deter the U.S. hostility with “nuclear weapons any time.”<sup>40</sup>

With this type of nuclear strategy, North Korea confronts certain challenges. One, this would make North Korea increase its warheads along with the delivery system, which in turn would put tremendous pressure on the centralized command and control system important for both safety and security of nuclear weapons and deterrence stability. Two, given the increasing pressure on the command and control system, North Korea would opt for pre-delegation of their deterrent forces which could increase the chances of an accidental nuclear use, casting dire security implications on the Korean Peninsula. Three, this type of strategy that may not become consistent with the minimum deterrence initially could be conceptualized by North Korea since it would go for more warheads and delivery systems as it finds itself frustrated and deprived of the third party patronage. Four, this could ultimately increase the chances of arms race in the East Asian region. Very recently, North Korea has expressed that it had successfully tested the submarine launched ballistic missile (SLBM) that would provide Pyongyang with the incentives for asymmetric attack options and assured second-strike capability. Also, it expressed that it has already acquired the technology to miniaturize nuclear weapons.<sup>41</sup>

In addition, this strategy would need North Korea to make a stronger and complex command and control system, which may not be completely possible for North Korea given its economic and technological backwardness. In order to make its asymmetric deterrence

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39. Reuters, “N. Korea Says has Power to Deter U.S. Nuclear Threat,” *Voice of America*, March 3, 2015.

40. Chris Irvine, “North Korea Threatens the U.S. with Nuclear Attacks,” *The Daily Mail*, September 15, 2015.

41. Weitz, “The South Korean-US Nuclear Alliance,” p. 403.

forces credible, it would need to acquire second-strike capability. It becomes more expensive for North Korea to achieve an assured second-strike capability, which in turn would encourage North Korea to use nuclear weapons at the early stages of conflict.<sup>42</sup> However, it is not clear how, where, and when North Korea would use nuclear weapons. North Korea's security leadership has yet to be transparent on the first use of nuclear weapons especially when it chooses to adopt the asymmetric nuclear strategy.

There could be some possible scenarios in which North Korea could use nuclear weapons, though they may have ambiguities — that is, the drastic domestic upheaval, a radically deteriorating relationship between China and the DPRK, and the creation and spread of rebel forces within North Korea could not only threaten the survival of the DPRK's regime, but also the safety and security of North Korea's nuclear weapons. North Korea would then expect the ROK-U.S. forces to confront this chaotic situation and to get hold of the North Korean nuclear weapons before they fall in the wrong hands. In such a scenario, North Korea would be under tremendous strategic pressure to use nuclear weapons in the early stages of conflict.<sup>43</sup> Ham and Lee presume that since the survival of the Kim Jong-un regime becomes important for North Korea — for whose survival North Korea acquired nuclear weapons capability — it could use nuclear weapons against the domestic uprising, the rebel forces within North Korea, and/or targets. This is not a convincing argument.<sup>44</sup>

Each of these possible scenarios holds great ambiguity, which in turn complicates asymmetric nuclear strategy North Korea opts for. One, any use of nuclear weapons against the rebel forces within North Korea could not even ensure the regime's survival as this type of war-fighting scenario would largely affect the North Koreans themselves including the credibility of its conventional forces that

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42. Smith, "North Korea's Evolving Nuclear Strategy," pp.11-12.

43. For interesting analysis see, Ham Hyeongpil and Lee Jaehak, "North Korea's Nuclear Decision-making and Plausible Scenarios," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 25, no. 3 (2013), pp. 399-413.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 405-406.

could have some deterring effects. Two, the possible scenario in which North Korea could use nuclear weapons in the early stages of war at the Korean Peninsula may not be a convincing argument because this could cause a sharp ROK-U.S. retaliation, which in turn may not be acceptable for North Korea. Nuclear weapons are not conventional weapons and they need not to be used for military purposes — that is, the very essence of minimum deterrence conceived here. North Korea could expect some form of the ROK-U.S. retaliation to cause unacceptable damages to North Korea and its regime if it uses nuclear weapons for military purposes. However, it could avoid such retaliation if North Korea does not threaten to use nuclear weapons, follow minimum deterrence and consider nuclear weapons as a political weapon for deterrence rather than for war-fighting purposes. North Korea may have learnt from vast strategic experiences of the Cold War era between the U.S. and the Soviet Union (Russia) where both sides did not use nuclear weapons although both sides were trying to acquire first strike capabilities and assign targets to their different categories of deterrent forces.

In addition, no nuclear weapons state sets fixed parameters for the use of nuclear weapons. The least possible reply one could get from nuclear weapons states is that these weapons could be used as a “last resort” and/or for security and deterrence purposes. There may be amalgamation of both military and political elements when it comes to nuclear weapons use, but the essentials of minimum deterrence teach North Korea not to consider these weapons as a war-fighting instrument. It is also not clear that nuclear weapons states with the first use option would necessarily use nuclear weapons in the early stages of war and/or strike first.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, it is not clear whether or not North Korea following the asymmetric strategy would use nuclear weapons in the early stages of war. It could have the incentive, but may not use nuclear weapons, which in turn could

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45. For an engaging discussion on this see, Zafar Khan, “Pakistan’s Nuclear First Use Doctrine: Obsessions and Obstacles,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 36, no. 1 (2015), pp. 149-170.

invite a bigger military response by the ROK-U.S. This could then have broader strategic implications on other major powers bordering with North Korea such as China and Russia who may not desire a military escalation to nuclear level. If North Korea faces disadvantages with this type of strategy with potential implications for the survivability of its regime in general and peace and security of the Korean Peninsula in particular, then North Korea could opt for an assured retaliation nuclear strategy.

### ***Assured Retaliation Nuclear Strategy***

The assured retaliation strategy demands that nuclear weapons states are unlikely to opt for first use option, but to strike after it is hit. It has direct deterring effects against the threats of nuclear attacks and coercions.<sup>46</sup> However, it is not clear whether or not a nuclear weapons state practicing assured retaliation would retaliate with nuclear weapons after being hit by advanced conventional forces.<sup>47</sup> For example, the U.S. advanced conventional force capability has created a dilemma for nuclear weapon states such as China and North Korea: whether they could sustain this type of strategy that supports the no-first use nuclear strategy. Despite the debate in China practicing retaliatory nuclear strategy that they would at some point depart from no-first use nuclear option,<sup>48</sup> Chinese official White Paper still claims

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46. Narang, "Nuclear Strategies of Emerging Nuclear Powers," p. 77. Basically, this nuclear strategy guides a nuclear weapons state to opt for no-first use option; that is, it would retaliate after it is hit with nuclear weapons.

47. Andrew Futter and Benjamin Zala, "Advanced US Conventional Weapons and Nuclear Advancement: Why the Obama Plan Won't Work," *The Non-Proliferation Review* 20, no. 1 (2013), pp. 107-122.

48. General Pan proposed some hypothetical possibilities China could use nuclear weapons: 1) if Washington uses tactical nuclear bomb against China's military assets in conflict at Taiwan; 2) If Washington uses conventional weapons to attack China's Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) silos or its nuclear infrastructure; and 3) if Washington successfully launches a limited nuclear attack against China. See, Pan Zhenqiang, "On China's No-First Use of Nuclear Weapons," *Pugwash Online*, November 26, 2002.

to have NFU option supporting assured retaliation strategy.<sup>49</sup> India also follows assured retaliation strategy claiming minimum deterrence after it tested nuclear weapons in 1998.<sup>50</sup> It may not be necessary for a nuclear weapons state practicing nuclear retaliatory strategy to follow the NFU option. The United States followed strategy of massive retaliation during the early stages of Cold War against its adversary. It continued to keep the first use nuclear option, but this option required the U.S. to acquire multiple types of warheads and delivery systems.<sup>51</sup>

Even this type of nuclear strategy would require North Korea to increase its deterrence forces. For example, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has observed the increased nuclear activities within North Korea nuclear site. This development comes after the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un asked the country to increase its deterrent forces despite the U.S. sanctions.<sup>52</sup> The assured retaliation nuclear strategy would require North Korea to acquire a second-strike capability, or at least some form of capability to strike back. The credibility and survivability of nuclear forces are important as part of this type of nuclear posture. The acquisition of second-strike capability can be in two forms. One, a nuclear weapons state acquires a sea-based deterrence (nuclear submarine) for achieving a classic

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49. See China's Official White Paper on China's Military Strategy, The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, May 26, 2015.

50. Swaran Singh, "India's Nuclear Doctrine: Ten Years since the Kargil Conflict," in *The Politics of Nuclear Weapons in South Asia*, Bhumitra Chakma (ed.) (London: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 57-74. For other interesting readings on India's nuclear policy see, Ashley Tellis, *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture: Between Recessed Deterrent and Ready Arsenal* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001); George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999); Basrur, *Minimum Deterrence and India's Nuclear Security*; Bharat Karnad, *India's Nuclear Policy* (Westport CT: Praeger, 2008); K. Sundarji, *Blind Men of Hindustan: India-Pak Nuclear War* (New Delhi: UBS Publishers, 1993).

51. For an excellent historical reading on nuclear strategy see, Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, pp. 79-86.

52. Sneha Shankar, "IAEA Finds Increased Activity at North Korea Nuclear Reactor While Kim Jong Un Calls for More Nuclear Arsenal," *International Business Times*, October 6, 2015.

form of assured retaliatory capability. Two, it could practice strategies of concealment, dispersal, hardening of silos, deception, etc. in order to achieve survivability of its deterrence forces to strike back. North Korea practicing these tactics for survivability of its nuclear forces under the umbrella of minimum deterrence could seek a second-strike capability without necessarily going for a nuclear submarine.

For example, Pakistan has deterred India in the past with its minimum deterrent forces in terms of practicing concealment and dispersal tactics without having a nuclear submarine (the assured second-strike capability).<sup>53</sup> North Korea may largely be practicing these deterrent tactics for survivability of its forces, most possibly, at its North side of the country so that the ROK-U.S. may not hit these forces because of the fear of its adverse effects on Russia and China bordering with North Korea.<sup>54</sup> If North Korea follows the assured retaliation strategy and keeps the first use option like the U.S. did during the peak of the Cold War, it would become extremely expensive for the DPRK to sustain. Besides, this type of amalgamated nuclear strategy would make North Korea appear aggressive and offensive, which in turn may not remain consistent with the minimum deterrence conceived here. However, if North Korea follows various tactics of survivability of its deterrent forces without necessarily going for an assured second-strike capability in the form of nuclear submarine, then this may appear defensive and support the essentials of minimum deterrence conceptualized here.

### **Multiple Nuclear Strategies: Implications for the Korean Peninsula**

Conceptually, every nuclear weapons state developed their nuclear weapons program with the minimum deterrence, which they could

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53. Khan, *Pakistan's Nuclear Policy*, pp. 44-47.

54. Smith, "North Korea's Evolving Nuclear Strategy," p. 20. However, there is no concrete evidence to this in terms of satellite images.

not sustain later because of the complexity associated with the simple language of minimum. Amongst these recognized nuclear weapons states, China, France, and Britain self-proclaim to possess a modest number of deterrent forces. India and Pakistan also officially declare to follow minimum deterrence. Both the U.S. and Russia have been reducing the number of warheads and could at some point follow the context of minimum deterrence.<sup>55</sup> However, the minimum for these nuclear weapons states may differ from each other as each of these nuclear weapons states falls in a distinct strategic environment.<sup>56</sup> As part of a broader nuclear policy, North Korea could also claim to follow minimum deterrence, but could increase its deterrent forces gradually along with sophisticated delivery systems depending on the strategic environment. North Korea may not sustain minimum deterrence for too long and soon it would find itself within the changing contours of minimum deterrence demanding for more. "How much is enough?" is a complex question and may become difficult for North Korea to define particularly when it is in the embryonic stages of nuclear development program as it strives to acquire more.

Under the pretext of minimum deterrence, North Korea would have multiple options for practicing nuclear strategies, but each of these available nuclear strategies could have implications for North Korea in general and on the Korea peninsula in particular. One, although concessionary nuclear strategy makes sure the survival of the DPRK's political regime, this could result in a strategic spill over the regime itself when and if this type of strategy turns to be complex where North Korea military forces could use nuclear forces against the home-grown rebels before North Korea expects the U.S. and its allies to get hold of nuclear weapons.

Two, catalytic nuclear strategy may attract North Korea to practice

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55. For an interesting analysis on the proposed minimum deterrence for the U.S. to adopt see, Keith B. Payne and James Schlesinger, "Minimum Deterrence: Examining the Evidence," *Comparative Strategy* 33, no. 1 (2014), pp. 2-103.

56. See, Keith B. Payne and John S. Foster Jr., "Nuclear Force Adaptability for Deterrence and Assurance: A Prudent Alternative to Minimum Deterrence," *Comparative Strategy* 34, no. 3 (2015), pp. 247-309.

for quite some time, having the strategic confidence in China to intervene as its close patronage to assist it in terms of achieving its political and diplomatic goals. Pessimistically, the third party intervention may not be guaranteed and as a result, North Korea could suffer by the credibility of its deterrence force being undermined, and it could threaten the security of the Korean Peninsula.

Three, the absence of a third party intervention makes North Korea adopt asymmetric nuclear strategy to use its nuclear weapons first at the time of conflict, but this is a scary strategy that makes North Korea rely on its deterrent forces and could openly threaten to use nuclear weapons in and across the Korean Peninsula. However, ambiguity would prevail and become the central part of North Korea strategy. Despite the asymmetric strategy, it would not be clear when, where, and how North Korea would exactly use its nuclear weapons. It would require transparency, but North Korea, like China and may other nuclear weapons states, may not display transparency and openness for obvious reasons.

Finally, following the assured retaliation strategy, North Korea would ensure the survivability of its deterrence forces by following the tactics of dispersal and concealment or it could acquire nuclear submarine. The strides for nuclear submarine for an assured second-strike capability would become expensive as this could require more warheads and it would encourage North Korea to first use nuclear weapons, though it may have the option to use nuclear weapons for retaliatory purposes, similar to what China and India officially maintain. Under the pretext of minimum deterrence, North Korea could adopt these important nuclear strategies gradually as it matures its nuclear weapons program. It can also have the combination of one or two types of nuclear strategies to meet its political and diplomatic goals. In addition to these strategic implications of each nuclear strategy North Korea adopts, North Korea would expect a ROK-U.S. strategic response.

First, the increased number of North Korea deterrent forces with various delivery systems would put a strategic pressure on South Korea to counter the emerging threat emanating out of North Korea

missiles productions. South Korea would have two options. One, it could withdraw from the NPT and go nuclear because of the serious threats from North Korea deterrent forces. Two, it may continue to rely on the consistent nuclear security guarantee the U.S. provides as part of its broader strategy of extended deterrence. On the first point, the U.S. would urge South Korea not to acquire nuclear weapons as other U.S. allies and partners would follow suit to meet their security interests, which in turn could affect the U.S. extended deterrence policy and its broader perspective of international non-proliferation efforts as part of the NPT. On the second point, the U.S. would be pleased to provide South Korea with defensive conventional force capability. Also, the U.S. would continue to station its military forces in South Korea for deterrence purposes as part of its security commitment to South Korea.

Second, although South Korea has been developing the Korean Air and Missile Defense (KAMD) as part of Ballistic Missile Defense system, this may not be sufficiently controlled by the South Koreans alone.<sup>57</sup> The U.S. involvement and assistantship would be required to make the ballistic missile defense (BMD) system successful. In addition to this, the U.S. has also emplaced Aegis missile defense system to protect South Korea from incoming North Korean cruise missiles. Also, the ROK and the U.S. discuss the possible deployment of the U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system which could intercept the short, medium and intermediate ballistic missiles during the terminal stages.<sup>58</sup> North Korea, Russia and China have already pressed South Korea not to accept THAAD, as this BMD system would particularly threaten the Chinese and Russian security interests.<sup>59</sup>

Third, there are increased ROK-U.S. joint military exercises from time to time to provide a deterring signaling to North Korea. These

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57. Weitz, "The South Korean-US Nuclear Alliance," pp. 401-415.

58. *Ibid.* p. 407.

59. See, John Power, "Russia: Korean THAAD Deployment is a Security Threat," *The Diplomat*, April 2, 2015; Clint Richard, "X-Band and THAAD as Good as Anti-China Trilateral Defense Agreement?" *The Diplomat*, October 24, 2014.

exercises include advanced and modernized conventional forces to deter the possible low-intensity threats. North Korea has already exploited “the gray areas” such as the episode of the sinking of South Korea’s *Cheonan* warship and the DPRK border shelling, which undermine the ROK-U.S. deterrence credibility.<sup>60</sup> To counter emerging threats at the low-intensity conflict, the U.S. would keenly be interested to strengthen its extended deterrence for its allies and partners in Asia. The U.S. continues to assist South Korea with modernized conventional forces to deter North Korea’s missile threats. Very recently, there has been a three-day discussion on tabletop exercise (TTX) and South Korea and the U.S. have conducted 1.5-Track deterrence dialogue.<sup>61</sup> Along with these drills, there are proposals for the production of Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) weapons and other sophisticated conventional forces to contain the low-intensity conflict on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>62</sup> The implications of North Korea going nuclear and its adoption of various combinations of nuclear strategies under the pretext of minimum deterrence are huge on the security architecture of Korean Peninsula. This could go worse amid the growing North Korea’s nuclear ambiguity and absence of its nuclear institutionalization.

## Conclusion

Little is known about North Korea’s nuclear policy and the operational strategy it would adopt as part of broader and increasing nuclear development program of the DPRK. Therefore, we would expect many speculative interpretations to predict North Korea’s adoption of various combinations of nuclear strategies. However, it can be argued that North Korea may not adopt such a policy that has

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60. For interesting analysis, see, Van Jackson, “Raindrops Keep Falling on My Nuclear Umbrella,” *Foreign Policy*, May 18, 2015.

61. Oh Seok-min, “S. Korea, U.S. to Stage Deterrence Drill Against N. Korea,” *Yonhap News Agency*, February 10, 2015.

62. Patrick M. Cronin, “Time to Actively Deter North Korea,” *The Diplomat*, June 25, 2014.

not been practiced by either major or smaller nuclear weapons states. There are lots of historical precedents on nuclear strategy for North Korea to opt for and refer to depending much on the prevailing strategic environment. With different perspective, this article has elaborated on the fact that North Korea could opt for a minimum deterrence as a broad-based nuclear policy and under the pretext of minimum deterrence, it would have multiple options to opt for to meet its security goals. We may not expect the North Korean security establishment to define what minimum would stand for and how many nuclear weapons would suffice North Korea's deterrence capability. Ambiguity will rule and play a central part within North Korea's evolving nuclear strategy. Each of these nuclear strategies North Korea opts for would have implications for North Korea in general and the Korean Peninsula in particular.

Since North Korea has tested its nuclear weapons three times, it is essential to institutionalize its nuclear weapons with stronger command and control mechanism to avoid the accidental use of nuclear weapons. Proper institutionalization of North Korea's nuclear weapons program would prevent their deterrence forces and related materials from falling in the wrong hands. Both China and Russia that are close allies of North Korea can assist North Korea with this essential part of nuclear development program. Institutionalization of nuclear weapons program would help North Korea craft a better strategy in terms of using its nuclear weapons for political rather than military purposes. One can then predict well the kind of nuclear strategy North Korea would opt for and why. North Korea has the option to follow minimum deterrence and declare its program for defensive rather than offensive purposes. The essentials of minimum deterrence lead us to predict that if North Korea retains the modest number of weapons, curbs on more nuclear tests, stays defensive and restrains from using its deterrent forces, then this could be consistent with minimum deterrence perceived here. However, if North Korea, in its embryonic stages of deterrent force development, increases its deterrent forces, miniaturizes nuclear weapons, develops sophisticated delivery systems, acquires an assured second-strike capability (nuclear

submarine) and appears to be more offensive, then this may not remain consistent with what is conceptualized here. Apparently, North Korea is in active pursuit of the latter rather than the former and it might encroach the essential contours of minimum deterrence conceived here, which would have dire security implications for the Korean Peninsula.

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