

DPRK-RUSSIAN RAPPROCHEMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR KOREAN SECURITY

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This article explores the reestablishment of normal state-to-state relations between Pyongyang and Moscow and its implications for peace and security of the Korean peninsula. This research begins with a historical overview of the process leading to DPRK-Russian rapprochement. It then discusses the new friendship treaty between Russia and North Korea, DPRK-Russian military relations, and Russia's position on North Korean nuclear and missile issues. In conclusion, this article analyzes the implications of the Pyongyang-Moscow rapprochement for Korean security. Russia wants to maintain a balanced relationship with the two Koreas, while separating politics and economics. Russia's even-handed approach toward the two Koreas thus will be most visible in political relations, and Moscow will continue to lean toward Seoul in economic and military cooperation. Pyongyang-Moscow military cooperation may intensify if they share a common threat or enemy.

I. Introduction

Russia's efforts to normalize its relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) began in earnest in 1996 and the signing the "Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness, and Cooperation" between Moscow and Pyongyang in February 2000 opened a new chapter for bilateral relations. By mending its estranged relationship with Pyongyang, Moscow wishes to maintain a balanced relationship with the two Koreas and by doing so to maximize its national interests on the Korean peninsula.

Moscow-Pyongyang relations deteriorated rapidly after Moscow opened diplomatic relations with Seoul in September 1990. Yeltsin's Russia continued to cultivate warm relations with Seoul, while keeping Pyongyang at arms length. Russia's renunciation of the 1961 mutual assistance treaty with the DPRK in 1995 (and its expiration in 1996) formally ended the anachronistic alliance, which had been based on common ideology and complementary geo-strategic interests.

This article explores the reestablishment of normal state-to-state relations between Pyongyang and Moscow and its implications for the peace and security of the Korean peninsula. My research begins with a historical overview of the process leading to DPRK-Russian rapprochement. It then discusses the new friendship treaty between Russia and North Korea, DPRK-Russian military relations, and Russia's position on North Korean nuclear proliferation issues. In conclusion, my article analyzes the implications of Pyongyang-Moscow rapprochement for Korean security.

II. Checkered Path to Rapprochement

In 1992-1995, Russian policy towards the two Koreas was unequivocally tilted toward South Korea. Moscow further cultivated a coopera-

tive partnership with Seoul and allowed its relations with Pyongyang to remain distant. Like Gorbachev, Yeltsin intended to improve Russia's ailing economy with South Korea's financial assistance and cooperation. In contrast, the main concern of President Roh Tae-Woo (1998-1993) of South Korea was to elicit Russia's political support for Seoul's position with respect to inter-Korean relations and North Korea's nuclear issues.

Moscow's tilt towards Seoul became evident with Yeltsin's official visit there in November 1992, when the two countries signed the treaty on basic relations. At the time, Yeltsin ignored and alienated North Korea, considering it to be an anachronistic regime with no future. Consequently, Russia maintained limited contacts with North Korea. In January 1992, former Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Rogachev visited Pyongyang as a special envoy of President Yeltsin and reached an understanding with the North Korean leadership about revising the Soviet-North Korean Treaty of 1961.¹ In late January 1993, Deputy Foreign Minister Georgi Kunadze visited Pyongyang as Yeltsin's special envoy in an effort to reestablish normal, good-neighborly relations between Pyongyang and Moscow.² The visit, however, did not produce any immediate, tangible improvement in bilateral relations. Although Russian leaders felt the necessity of maintaining a balanced relationship with the two Koreas to maximize Russian national interests, Russia's Korea policy remained tilted in favor of Seoul. Moscow's gestures towards Pyongyang were lukewarm at best, and more importantly Pyongyang was not ready to restore normal relations.

Beginning in 1996, actions finally caught up with rhetoric when Moscow began to pursue a "balanced" relationship with the two Koreas in earnest. Soon after Primakov's appointment as foreign minister,

1 Yonhap, January 28, 1992, in FBIS-EAS-92-020, January 30, 1992, p. 33.

2 Alexandr Zhebin and Vadim Tkachenko, "Kunadze Flies to Pyongyang Via Beijing," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 17, p. 4, in *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, March 24, 1993, pp. 13-14.

Moscow accelerated its efforts to normalize relations with Pyongyang. Russia was “gradually overcoming ‘a stage of romanticism,’” and entering a stage of balanced development in relations with both the DPRK and the ROK.³ Russia sustained its complementary partnership with South Korea in political, economic, and military areas, while it moved to reestablish a normal relationship with North Korea.

For reasons of national security, as well as for political and economic reasons, Russia seeks to establish a normal state-to-state relationship with North Korea that is based on the principles of good neighborliness and cooperation. Fearing a North Korean collapse would endanger its Far East security, the Russians want to minimize security risks by mediating between the two Koreas and by inducing inter-Korean dialogue and peaceful unification. Russia is no longer considered a major player in the resolution of the Korean question because it neglected its relations with North Korea and, by doing so, lost its leverage over the Stalinist regime. Russia seeks to regain political influence and prestige in Northeast Asia by maintaining influence over both Koreas.

In the economic realm, Russia is disappointed with Seoul’s limited investment activities inside its territory. Moscow needs to normalize its relations with Pyongyang in order to recover the 3.6 billion rubles in debt from North Korea. North Korea’s cooperation is necessary for the successful completion of the natural gas pipeline project from Yakutiya to South Korea. Furthermore, a resumption of economic cooperation with Pyongyang will benefit the Russian economy, especially in the Russian Far East.

Deputy Premier Vitali Ignatenko’s Pyongyang visit on April 10-12, 1996, was a watershed, after which Moscow-Pyongyang normalization gained momentum. Ignatenko led a Russian delegation to participate

3 V. I. Denisov, “Russia and the Problem of Korean Unification,” in Tae-Hwan Kwak (ed.), *The Four Powers and Korean Unification Strategies* (Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1997), p. 38.

in the first meeting of the Russo-North Korean Inter-governmental Commission on Economic and Science-Technological Affairs.⁴ Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Panov also accompanied Ignatenko. This was the highest-level meeting (at the deputy prime ministerial level) between Moscow and Pyongyang since the collapse of the Soviet Union. During the visit, the two countries agreed to restore bilateral trade and economic cooperation to its 1991 level. The two sides also agreed to restore bilateral inter-governmental commissions and to establish working-level bodies between North Korea and the Russian Far Eastern province for bilateral cooperation in science-technology, forestry, light industry, and transportation.

Ignatenko carried Yeltsin's personal message to Kim Jong Il. In the message, Yeltsin expressed his hopes for tension reduction on the Korean peninsula and North Korea's continuing observance of the Armistice Agreement. Kim Jong Il, predicting that Zyuganov, the Communist Party leader, would win the coming presidential election in June-July 1996, did not even send a letter of reply, nor did he meet with the Russian delegation.⁵ On April 26-29, 1996, Grenadier Seleznev, speaker of the Russian State Duma and a communist, led a Russian parliamentary delegation on an official visit to North Korea for the purpose of continuing the Russian government's efforts to normalize bilateral ties. During the visit, representatives from both countries discussed ways to develop relations between the two countries and exchanged views on the present situation on the peninsula.⁶ Kim Jong Il, however, still refused to meet with the Russian delegation. By sending Ignatenko and a State Duma delegation to Pyongyang in April

4 Moscow and Pyongyang agreed to establish the intergovernmental commission for economic and technological-scientific affairs in May 1991 and scheduled its first meeting for October 1992 in Pyongyang. Its first meeting, however, materialized three and a half years later than originally scheduled.

5 *Choson Ilbo*, April 12, 1996.

6 Voice of Russia World Service, May 29, 1996 in FBIS-SOV-96-105, May 29, 1996.

1996, Moscow restored high-level political dialogue with Pyongyang which had been discontinued in the early 1990s.

In the wake of Ignatenko's trip, Moscow and Pyongyang rapidly signed a number of bilateral agreements on investment protection, scientific cooperation, and cultural exchanges. On November 28, 1996, DPRK Ambassador to Russia Son Song-Pul and Russian Minister of Economy Yevgeniy Yasin signed an agreement on the encouragement and mutual protection of investment in Moscow.⁷ On December 16, Vice-Director Pak Yong-Hyop of the DPRK National Academy of Sciences and Secretary General N. Aplate of the Russian Academy of Sciences signed an agreement on scientific cooperation and a protocol on 1996-2000 scientific cooperation in Moscow.⁸ On December 26, Vice-Chairman Kim Yong-Su of the Korean Committee for Cultural Relations With Foreign Countries and Russian Ambassador to the DPRK Valeriy Denisov signed an agreement on cultural cooperation in Pyongyang.⁹

In 1997, regular contacts and exchanges were established between the Russian and North Korean Foreign Ministries and between the two parliaments. In May 1997, a Russian parliamentary delegation led by Vladimir Lukin, chairman of the State Duma International Affairs Committee, visited Pyongyang. In June 1997, another Russian delegation led by Mikhail Monastirskiy, chairman of the Southeast Asia and Asia-Pacific Area Subcommittee of the Geopolitical Affairs Committee of the State Duma, visited Pyongyang for talks with members of DPRK Supreme People's Assembly.

In addition, economic and trade relations between Russia and North Korea were being restored. The second meeting of the inter-governmental commission on trade, economic, scientific and technological cooperation was held in Moscow from October 13 to 15, 1997. The pur-

7 Pyongyang KCNA, December 2, 1996, in FBIS-EAS-96-232.

8 Pyongyang KCNA, December 22, 1996, in FBIS-EAS-96-247.

9 Pyongyang KCNA, December 26, 1996, in FBIS-EAS-96-249.

pose of this meeting was to find ways to resume cooperation in the various fields that had been interrupted since early 1990s. This meeting was considered a framework meeting and is of a consultative and recommendatory character. During the session, the DPRK and Russia signed four documents of an economic nature: three protocols on agricultural cooperation, interaction in the sphere of the veterinary science and a quarantine of plants and the protocol "on economic and technological cooperation."¹⁰ In this session, North Korea for the first time officially pledged to repay its debts to Moscow, and the parties signed an agreement in principle to resolve the debt problem.¹¹ The details on debt repayment would be worked out in the future.

In a goodwill gesture to the famine-stricken neighbor, Russia delivered humanitarian aid to North Korea twice in 1997. Russia sent to North Korea food and medicine, worth 4.5 billion "old" Rubles, in the fall, and 370 tons of sugar, canned meat, fish and milk worth 3.5 billion rubles, in December.¹²

In the same year, the two countries began discussions on a new treaty that would replace the 1961 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance concluded by the USSR and the DPRK.¹³ Leonid Moiseyev, head of the Russian Foreign Ministry's First Asian Department, visited Pyongyang in March 1998 for political consultations. While in Pyongyang, he discussed a new treaty. Both parties agreed to jointly celebrate the 50th anniversary of the opening of diplomatic relations between the two countries.¹⁴ Vice Foreign Minister Grigoriy Karasin visited Pyongyang in March 1999 to initial the new treaty. In 1999, exchange visits continued. A DPRK-Russia Goodwill

10 Vladimir Nadashkevich, *ITAR-TASS*, October 14, 1997, in FBIS-SOV-97-288.

11 *Korea Times*, October 17, 1997, p. 1; Alexei Filatov, "Russia, North Korea Sign Four Economic Accords," *ITAR-TASS*, October 16, 1997 in FBIS-SOV-97-289, October 16, 1997.

12 *ITAR-TASS*, March 7, 1998, FBIS-SOV-98-066, March 7, 1998.

13 *Choson Ilbo*, November 9, 1997.

14 *ITAR-TASS*, March 12, 1998, in FBIS-SOV-98-071, March 12, 1998.

Association delegation, headed by Yi Song-ho vice chairman of the Committee for Cultural Relations With Foreign Countries, visited Moscow in February and a DPRK-Russia goodwill parliamentarian's delegation visited Russia twice in March and April.

In February 2000, Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov arrived in Pyongyang to sign the new treaty that had been initialed in March of the previous year. This was the first visit to the DPRK by a Russian Foreign Minister.¹⁵ In contrast, South Korea and Russia have held six summit meetings and exchanged four foreign ministers' visits over the past 8 years. During his two-day visit, he met with DPRK leaders including Kim Young-Nam chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, but could not meet with Kim Jong Il.¹⁶

III. The Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness, and Cooperation

The fate of the 1961 alliance treaty between the DPRK and the Soviet Union was a sensitive issue in Russian relations with the two Koreas. Seoul repeatedly expressed strong misgivings about Article 1 of the treaty, which stipulated automatic military involvement of the parties in case of war. Since Moscow did not renounce the treaty in 1992, it was extended for another five years in accordance with the treaty stipulation.

The Russian Foreign Ministry initially intended to amend individ-

15 Eduard Shevardnadze's last visit to Pyongyang was on September 2-3, 1990, whose main purpose was to inform the North Korean leadership of the imminent conclusion of diplomatic ties between the Soviet Union and South Korea. But at the time he visited the DPRK in the capacity of *Soviet* Foreign Minister.

16 Russia had requested a meeting between Ivanov and Defense Commission Chair Kim Jong Il, but North Korea did not grant the request, which was one of the reasons why Ivanov's trip had been delayed. "Russian Minister's Visit to N.K. Won't Affect Seoul-Moscow Ties," *The Korea Herald*, February 10, 2000.

ual articles of the 1961 treaty rather than renounce it. Under the Russian Constitution, renunciation of a treaty requires the approval of the Russian parliament, and it was feared that then Russian parliament, which was dominated by opposition parties at that time, might not approve the termination of the old treaty. The Russian Foreign Ministry wanted to amend the treaty by exchanging letters with the DPRK at the foreign minister level, bypassing the parliamentary procedure.¹⁷

During his trip to Pyongyang in January 1993, Deputy Foreign Minister Georgii Kunadze proposed that Russia and the DPRK exchange supplementary memoranda providing an interpretation of the clause in the treaty that calls for automatic military intervention. According to the interpretation, Russia would intervene militarily only if North Korea becomes a target of an unprovoked attack. North Korea, however, did not show any interest in the proposal. Under the circumstances, Kunadze unilaterally informed the North Korean government that Russia would honor the clause strictly in accordance with the UN Charter and its international obligations and only when North Korea comes under “unprovoked attack.”¹⁸

On August 7, 1995, Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev proposed to the DPRK Ambassador in Moscow that the two countries conclude a new treaty on the grounds that the 1961 treaty “had grown outdated and did not correspond to the new circumstances.” At the same time, the Russian Foreign Ministry handed him the Russian draft of the new treaty.¹⁹ In this way, Russia initiated negotiations on the new treaty without going through the formal parliamentary procedure for treaty renunciation. Georgi Kunadze, then Russian Ambassador to

17 Vadim Tkachenko, “Russian-Korean Cooperation to Preseve the Peace on the Korean Peninsula,” *Far Eastern Affairs*, No. 2, 1999, p. 31.

18 Georgy Kunadze, “Russia’s Hands Tied over N. Korea,” *The Daily Yomiuri*, December 2, 1999; Yonhap, February 5, 1993, in FBIS-SOV-93-023, February 5, 1993, p. 9.

19 Tkachenko, “Russian-Korean Cooperation to Preseve the Peace on the Korean Peninsula,” p. 32.

Seoul, shed light on this matter:

As a result of the outcry [over Russia's exclusion from the 1994 U.S.-DPRK nuclear deal], the Russian government had to forgo the procedure of denouncing the alliance treaty with North Korea. According to the Russian Constitution, the right to ratify or nullify any treaty is vested in the State Duma (lower house), which must decide the issue by majority vote. Extending the treaty was inconceivable.

But for a denouncement plea to be rejected by the Duma would have been a total embarrassment, and the Russian government therefore had to settle for a less formal procedure. In the summer of 1995, it forwarded a draft of a new standard treaty to North Korea.²⁰

In 1996, Russia formally announced the expiration of the 1961 alliance treaty.²¹ On September 3, 1996, the DPRK handed over its own draft of the new treaty to the Russian Foreign Ministry.

In February 1997, the first round of talks on the new treaty was held in Pyongyang.²² The negotiations, however, encountered obstacles when North Korea insisted on the inclusion of an automatic military intervention clause and of Russia's support for Pyongyang's unification formula (the Koryo Confederation) in the new treaty. Russia rejected these demands, and instead insisted on a provision stating that the resolution of inter-Korean problems should be based on the UN Charter and the principles of international law.²³ In July, the second round of meeting was convened, but the two sides failed to narrow their differences.²⁴ By late 1998, Russia and the DPRK had agreed that the new treaty should not include a clause on automatic military intervention.²⁵

20 Kunadze, "Russia's Hands Tied over N. Korea," *The Daily Yomiuri*, December 2, 1999.

21 The 1961 treaty expired on June 10, 1996.

22 Tkachenko, "Russian-Korean Cooperation to Preserve the Peace on the Korean Peninsula," p. 32.

23 KBS-1 Radio Network in Korean 0600 GMT June 17, 1997, in FBIS-EAS-97-168.

24 *Choson Ilbo*, November 9, 1997; *Tonga Ilbo*, December 1, 1997, p. 2.

After more than two years of negotiations, the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation between Russia and the DPRK was initialed on March 17, 1999, by Deputy Foreign Ministers Grigory Karasin and Lee In Koo, when the Russian diplomat was on a visit to Pyongyang.

The signing of the treaty was delayed several times. Initially, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov was scheduled to visit Pyongyang in late May of the same year to sign the treaty. His visit was delayed due to Russia's involvement in NATO's air strike in the former Yugoslavia and ROK President Kim Dae Jung's official visit to Moscow. Ivanov planned to visit Pyongyang in early June right after President Kim Dae Jung's visit to Moscow in late May. This time, North Korea requested the postponement of the visit citing its Foreign Minister's busy work schedule as the reason.²⁶ Obviously, by delaying Ivanov's Pyongyang trip, the DPRK wished to express its displeasure over President Kim Dae Jung's Moscow trip. Ivanov then planned to go to Pyongyang in November 1999 but, "for purely internal Russian reasons connected with the fact that it was necessary for the Minister to be in Moscow in that period," this time the Russian side requested a postponement of the visit.²⁷

Such delays were an obvious sign that neither Moscow nor Pyongyang was eager to sign the treaty early. Russia was preoccupied with more pressing problems at home and abroad, and an early conclusion of the treaty with North Korea was not high on its agenda. North Korea, in turn, was still biding its time hoping that political changes in Russia would usher in a pro-Pyongyang regime in the Kremlin. Besides, North Korea could not expect tangible and immediate benefits such as substantial economic and military aid from the

25 Yury Alekseyev, "North Korea Starts Emerging from Isolation," *Dipkouryer* (Moscow), February 3, 2000.

26 ITAR-TASS, July 14, 1999, in *FBIS-SOV-1999-0714*.

27 ITAR-TASS, December 7, 1999, in *FBIS-SOV-1999-120*.

treaty.

Finally, Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov came to Pyongyang for a two-day visit on February 9-10, 2000. Ivanov and his counterpart Paik Nam-Sun signed the "Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the DPRK" on February 9. Thereby the legal foundation on the two countries' basic relations was laid.

The first article of the twelve article treaty stipulates that the sides intend to develop friendly relations on the principles of mutual respect for state sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, equality, mutual benefit, territorial integrity, and other universally recognized principles.²⁸

As expected, a clause on automatic military intervention is absent from the new treaty. Nor does it contain support for DPRK's confederate unification formula. The treaty does, however, call for "mutual contact" if a security emergency arises: "In the event of the emergence of the danger of an aggression against one of the countries or a situation jeopardizing peace and security, the sides undertake to enter into contact with each other immediately." This clause does not stipulate military intervention or military aid between the parties in case one of the parties is involved in an armed attack.

Still, this vague and ambiguous clause may be subject to different interpretations. The treaty does not clarify the meaning of "contact", nor does it stipulate what measures may (or may not) be taken after "contact." The inclusion of this clause and its ambiguity seem to be a result of two factors.

First, instead of further alienating North Korea by completely ignoring its position, Russia seems to have chosen a compromise solution.

28 At this writing, the full text of the treaty is not available, and author's description of the treaty is based on the information included in Alexander Valiyev and Alexei Golyayev, "Russia-DPRK New Treaty is Historical Landmark in Relations," *Itar-Tass*, February 10, 2000.

The DPRK had insisted on the inclusion in the new treaty of a clause stipulating automatic military intervention, whereas the Russian Federation had maintained that such an inclusion would be anachronistic and unrealistic. The two parties seem to have met half way by agreeing on the insertion of the “contact” requirement.

Second, Russia will have a maximum level of flexibility in interpreting and implementing the treaty because of the vagueness. By not clearly defining the meaning of “contact” in advance, Russia may have wanted to retain the right to intervene (or not to intervene) militarily or otherwise in an armed conflict on the Korean peninsula. Russia’s intervention (or non-intervention) would then depend on its own interpretation of the clause under specific circumstances.

In January 1993, Deputy Foreign Minister Georgi Kunadze unilaterally notified North Koreans that Russia would render military assistance to North Korea only when the latter became the victim of an unprovoked attack. The new treaty would allow Russia even more flexibility than such a re-interpretation of the old treaty would have in deciding military intervention in the Korean peninsula. In this sense, the new treaty is tantamount to a watered-down “defensive” alliance.

In addition, the new treaty stipulates that the two sides will “not conclude any treaty of agreement with a third country nor join in its action if it stands against the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of any of the parties.”²⁹ Except for the two clauses mentioned above, the new treaty is similar to the basic treaty between the ROK and the Russian Federation concluded in November 1992.

29 “Normalized N.K.-Russia relations seen to help cement inter-Korean ties,” *The Korea Herald*, February 11, 2000.

IV. Military Cooperation

The Soviet Union was North Korea's main source of modern weaponry and military equipment. The Soviet Union, however, stopped supplying North Korea with offensive weapons after establishing diplomatic relations with Seoul in September 1990.³⁰ The Russian Foreign Ministry has repeatedly stated that Russia, on the basis of commercial profit, is ready to supply North Korea with defensive weapons. Nevertheless, the current level of military-technical cooperation between Moscow and Pyongyang is negligible due mainly to the lack of hard currency on the part of the latter.

According to Colonel General Leonid Ivachev of the Russian Defense Ministry, Russia maintains military technology cooperation with North Korea and continues to ship, on a limited scale, military weapons (mostly spare parts of the weapons provided by the USSR to North Korea in the Soviet era) to its former ally.³¹ Asked if Russia gave priority to North or South Korea in military trade, Russian Foreign Minister Primakov responded: "Why should we give priorities? We are prepared to and do cooperate with everybody." He further added: "It [arms sales] keeps much of our [military] industry afloat, makes payment of wages possible and helps the social spheres."³²

North Korea's military has not acquired Russia's modern weapons. Although Pyongyang proposed a Moscow-North Korean joint production of these weapons and subsequent exports of portion of the products, negotiations on this issue became deadlocked because Moscow demanded payments in cash, whereas Pyongyang requested credit.³³

30 When South Korea decided to provide \$3 billion in economic aid to the Soviet Union, it asked the Soviet Union not to supply offensive weapons to North Korea.

31 *Seoul Shinmun*, May 26, 1997, p. 16.

32 Interfax, July 24, 1997, in FBIS-SOV-97-212.

33 Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network, The DPRK Report (November-December 1996) at http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/special_reports/.

As long as Moscow insists on payment in cash for military purchases, Moscow's arms sales to Pyongyang will remain limited. Although some pro-North Korean groups inside Russia, especially Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, favors renewing weapons subsidies to North Korea, Russia is not likely to ship sophisticated weapons to North Korea on credit.

The report in January 1994 on Moscow's decision to sell 12 de-commissioned submarines to Pyongyang attracted much attention. The submarines were to be sold as scrap metal at \$276,000 for a total of 2,126 tons (\$130 a ton) to North Korea, and ten of which were Golf II class equipped with three SSN-5 ballistic missiles. It was feared that North Korea might use parts of the Golf II class submarines for its missile program.³⁴ There were also reports that Russia, on a regular basis for a fee, continues to supply North Korea with spy satellite photos of both South Korean and U.S. military installations.³⁵

Cash-strapped North Korea cannot afford expensive military hardware. North Korea's imports of military items in recent years are modest. According to the ROK Defense Ministry, in 1999 Pyongyang imported eight MI-8 helicopters from Russia and 40 MIG-21 fighters from Kazakhstan for \$12 million. In 1998, Pyongyang purchased \$51.8 million worth arms from abroad: \$2.78 million for ammunition, tank engines and blankets from China; \$2.6 million for ammunition and anti-air guns from Kazakhstan; \$3.15 million for tank engines and engine batteries from Slovakia; and \$43.27 million for MI-8 and MI-26

34 Vladimir B. Yakubovskiy "Economic Relations between Russia and DPRK," *Korea and World Affairs*, Vol. 20, NO. 3 (Fall 1996), p. 462.

35 This allegation is based on the testimonies of Major Lee Chul-Soo, who defected to South Korea flying a MiG-19 in 1996, and Lee Kwang-Soo, the infiltrator captured during the 1996 submarine infiltration incident. Cf. *Kyonghyang Shinmun*, September 18, 1997, p. 2; *The Korea Times*, June 25, 1996. The spokesman of the Russian military's General Staff refuted the allegation. See "Russia: Army Denies Selling Satellite Intelligence to North Korea," ITAR-TASS, June 25, 1996, in FBIS-SOV-96-124, June 25, 1996.

choppers and trucks from Russia.³⁶

In an effort to import military hardware at bargain prices, North Korea is engaged in smuggling weapons and military equipment through illegal channels. In October 1998, officers of Khasan Customs Office on the Russian-DPRK border detained five Mi-8T military helicopters that were prepared for a flight to the DPRK. The helicopters were without any weapons and aircraft identification device, and the export document was without any signatures of the Russian government and military authorities.³⁷ Investigation revealed that Russian military personnel sold each helicopter to a middleman-firm Arden in the Khabarovsk, for 60,000 to 100,000 Rubles at an official military sale at a Moscow auction. Examination of the helicopters also revealed that all the weapons control systems on board remained intact, although they should have been dismantled.³⁸

In 1999, North Korea illegally purchased 40 MiG-21 jet fighters from Kazakhstan. According to a senior government official of the ROK, from July 1999, North Korea was assembling 40 MiG-21s that it had imported from Kazakhstan.³⁹ In March 1999, Azerbaijan detained a Russian transport plane in Baku that was carrying six MiG-21 jet fighters for North Korea. The transport plane took off from Kazakhstan and was impounded after stopping in Baku for refueling.⁴⁰ According to the BIS counter-intelligence service of the Czech republic, Agroplast, one of the world's largest weapons smuggling groups, was behind the illegal export of six MiG-21 planes. Agroplast, which operates from Russia, was reportedly linked to illegal exports of weapons to North Korea, Iran, Libya and Ecuador.⁴¹

36 *The Korea Herald*, September, 29, 1999.

37 *The Korea Times*, October 8, 1998.

38 Yevgeniya Lents, ITAR-TASS, October 14, 1998, in FBIS-SOV-98-287; Boris Reznik, "How a Combat Squadron was Stolen," *Izvestia*, October 30, 1998.

39 *The Korean Herald*, August 9, 1999.

40 Michael R. Gordon, "Azerbaijan Detains Russian MIG Shipment" *The New York Times*, March 24, 1999.

According to Park Choon-Taek, Air Force Chief of the General Staff of the ROK, North Korea is intent on purchasing MiG-29 fighter planes: "We have information that North Korea has wanted to buy new fighters since 1998, and to that end, it has been reinforcing airstrips."⁴² North Korea now possesses 16 MiG-29 fighters that were assembled from components imported from Russia in 1989.⁴³

V. North Korean Nuclear and Missile Issues

Russia is committed to nuclear nonproliferation in the Korean peninsula because nuclear weapons in the possession of unpredictable and unstable North Korea would pose a grave threat to the Russian Far East. Furthermore, nuclear armament by North Korea (or South Korea) would prompt Japanese nuclear armament and accelerate its remilitarization, which Russia wishes to avoid.

Nuclear Weapons Program

Since the 1980s, North Korea's suspected nuclear weapons program has attracted worldwide attention.⁴⁴ The international belief that North Korea was engaged in the production of nuclear weapons allowed Pyongyang to use the nuclear issue as a bargaining device in dealing with South Korea, the U.S., and Japan.

It was with Soviet help that North Korea initiated its nuclear pro-

41 Prague CTK, October 12, 1999, in FBIS-EEU-1999-1013.

42 *Chungang Ilbo*, October 6, 1999, in FBIS-EAS-1999-1006.

43 "NKorea starts assembly of MiG-29sreport," *ITAR/TASS*, August 20, 1999.

44 For North Korea's nuclear weapons program, Tae-Hwan Kwak and Seung-Ho Joo, "The Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula: Problems and Prospects," *Arms Control*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (August 1993), pp. 65-92; James Clay Moltz and Alexandre Y. Mansourov (eds.) *The North Korean Nuclear Program: Security, Strategy, and New Perspectives from Russia* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

gram. In 1956, Pyongyang signed a nuclear research agreement with the Soviet Union. In the same year, North Korean scientists and engineers were sent to the Soviet Union to study nuclear energy at the Dhubna International Institute of Nuclear Research and other Soviet research centers. Since then, over 60 North scientists and engineers were trained in areas such as construction of reactors, radiology, radiochemistry, nuclear physics, and nuclear facilities. In 1961, North Korea launched a major nuclear development program at Yongbyon, some 60 miles north of Pyongyang. In 1965, the Soviet Union provided North Korea with a 2 MW IRT-2000 research reactor for the Yongbyon nuclear facilities and annually supplied 2 kilograms of enriched uranium as the reactor's fuel.⁴⁵ In 1967, the research reactor began to produce radioactive isotopes for industry and science. In 1977, North Korea joined the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

During the Kim Il Sung-Chernenko Moscow summit in 1984, the construction of nuclear power plants in North Korea with Soviet aid was first broached. The Soviet Union promised to assist North Korea with nuclear technology and materials on the condition that North Korea would sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In December 1985, North Korea signed the NPT, and in the same month North Korea and the Soviet Union signed in Moscow two inter-governmental agreements on technical-economic cooperation and on building atomic power plants in North Korea. In 1987 Russia began to conduct several feasibility studies to build three light-water reactors at Sinpo on North Korea's east coast.

After Seoul-Moscow normalization in September 1990, the Soviet

45 North Koreans later expanded the reactor's capacity to 4 MW and then to 8MW on their own. North Korea has enough supply of uranium ore on its soil. It is estimated that North Korea has 26 million tons of uranium ore in reserve. See Oleg V. Davydov, "Russia's Position towards North Korea's Nuclear Development," Il Yung Chung and Eunsook Chung eds., *Russia in the Far East and Pacific Region* (Seoul: The Sejong Institute, 1994), p. 367.

Union doubled its efforts to urge North Korea to renounce its nuclear weapons program. Seoul and Moscow shared a common interest in preventing a nuclear-armed North Korea. The South Korean government repeatedly asked for the Kremlin's cooperation in attempts to abort Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program. Soviet pressure on North Korea over the nuclear issue invited only negative reactions from Pyongyang. Yielding to mounting international pressure, North Korea belatedly signed the safeguards agreement in January 1992, six years after signing the NPT.

In 1991 Moscow agreed to provide Pyongyang with three 660-megawatts light-water nuclear reactors (LWRs) nuclear power plants valued at \$4 billion. By the beginning of 1993, the fieldwork to construct the nuclear power plants was almost complete, but North Koreans refused to pay Russian governmental and private enterprises for their work (estimated at \$1.7-\$4.7 million).⁴⁶

Differences over the issue of the IAEA inspection of two suspected nuclear waste sites in North Korea led to heightened tensions in Korea and in Northeast Asia in 1993. North Korea announced its plan to withdraw from the NPT in 1993 in defiance of mounting international pressure to fully renounce its nuclear weapons program. The LWRs project between Russia and North Korea discontinued in April 1993, when President Boris Yeltsin signed an executive order suspending the project in the midst of heightened tensions following North Korea's announcement to withdraw from the NPT. At the same time, Moscow discontinued its nuclear assistance to North Korea, which entailed an abrupt halt to personnel training, supplying of nuclear fuel and exchange of nuclear specialists.⁴⁷

46 Alexander Zhebin, "A Political History of Soviet-North Korean Nuclear Cooperation," in James Clay Moltz and Alexandre Y. Mansourov (eds.), *The North Korean Nuclear Program: Security, Strategy, and New Perspectives from Russia* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 33.

47 Shim Jae Hoon, "Korea: Silent Partner," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, December 29 &

Finally, U.S.-North Korea high-level talks in Geneva resulted in a compromise solution to the North Korean nuclear issue on October 21, 1994. North Korea pledged to abandon its suspected nuclear weapons program in exchange for economic and technical assistance, including the construction of two light water nuclear reactors (LWRs), and improved relations with the U.S. The Agreed Framework between Washington and Pyongyang, to be implemented in three phases, set forth a timetable of 10 years during which the North Koreans have agreed to dismantle their nuclear program.⁴⁸ In accordance with the agreement, an international consortium, the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) was created to implement economic and technical assistance to North Korea. The international consortium, led by the U.S., South Korea, and Japan, decided in principle to supply Pyongyang with two South Korean model LWRs.

Russia complained about the October 1994 nuclear agreement between Washington and Pyongyang. Russian commentators criticized the U.S. for not having consulted with Russia in forming the international consortium.⁴⁹ Aleksandr Panov, Deputy Foreign Minister, expressed Russia's misgivings about the U.S. treatment of Russia as a "junior partner" in the international consortium and even threatened to boycott the organization: "[Russia] may even refuse to join the organization which is being formed for this purpose by the United States, South Korea, and Japan, if it be only offered a secondary role in it."⁵⁰ As a matter of fact, the U.S. initially wanted to provide North Korea with Russian model LWRs. In the summer of 1994, the U.S. had decided to supply North Korea with light-water reactors of a Russian

January 5, 1995, p. 14.

48 Michael R. Gordon, "US-North Korea Accord Has a 10-Year Timetable," and Alan Riding, "US and NK Sign Atom Pact," *The New York Times*, October 22, 1994.

49 Valeriya Sycheva, "For Some They Are Terrorists but For Others They Are Partners," *Kommersant Daily* (Moscow), January 10, 1995, A4.

50 "Russia Wants Large Role in Reforming North Korean Nuclear Program," ITAR-TASS, January 25, 1995.

model.⁵¹ However, insistence of South Korea, KEDO decided to adopt South Korean model LWRs for North Korea.

While U.S. government sources estimate that North Korea had already produced sufficient plutonium to manufacture one nuclear bomb or more, Soviet (and later Russian) government sources consistently maintain that North Korea did not possess nuclear weapons nor sufficient weapons-grade plutonium needed to make a nuclear bomb.

The Russian Foreign Intelligence Service issued a report in 1992 that North Korea did not yet possess nuclear weapons.⁵² In a press conference held during his visit to Seoul in November 1992, Yeltsin stated that Pyongyang had neither nuclear materials nor the required technology to manufacture nuclear bombs.⁵³ Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev stated in an interview with *Izvestiya* held in June 1994 that North Korea did not possess nuclear weapons, and it would take at least 3 to 7 years before they could develop nuclear weapons. Two officials from the Russian Ministry of Atomic Energy, one of whom headed construction at the Soviet-built nuclear facility in North Korea, said in June 1994 that North Korea has no nuclear weapons and possesses only a tiny fraction of the plutonium needed to make a viable nuclear device.⁵⁴ Georgii Kunadze, Russian ambassador to Seoul, also told a South Korean newspaper that North Korea did not possess

51 This information is revealed by Lee Byong-Ryong, the former leader of the DPRK LWR Team at the Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute. Lee was the only South Korean who participated in all stages of the DPRK LWR negotiation. See Lee's article in *SINDONG-A* (in Korean), February 1996, pp 394-419, in FBIS-KST-96-005-L.

52 "A New Challenge After the End of the Cold War, The Proliferation of the Weapons of Mass Destruction," *The Report of Foreign Intelligence Service of Russian Federation* (Moscow: 1992, in Russian), pp. 92-93, cited in Oleg V. Davidov, "Russia's Position towards North Korea's Nuclear Development," p. 369.

53 Yeltsin stated: "I do not think the North can develop nuclear arms without assistance from Russia. Russia has stopped supplying the North with nuclear materials and related technology, and I believe that the North has stopped developing nuclear arms" (Source material in *Korea and World Affairs* [Winter 1992], p. 754).

54 *Chosun Ilbo*, June 19, 1994.

nuclear weapons.⁵⁵

On March 10, 1992, the Russian newspaper *Argumenty I Fakty* (Arguments and Facts) published the text of a February 1990 report on North Korea's nuclear program submitted by then KGB director Vladimir Kryuchkov to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party.⁵⁶ The KGB report stated: "According to available data, development of the first explosive nuclear device has been completed at the DPRK nuclear research center in Yongbyon." The report further stated that North Korea had decided not to test the device in order to avoid international detection.⁵⁷ Then Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev later dismissed this report as "worthless."

The dissolution of the Soviet Union increased the danger of nuclear proliferation. In the transition to a new political order, the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) cannot exercise full control over its nuclear scientists, nuclear parts, and materials. There have been reports that nuclear materials in the CIS are being smuggled out of the country to Third World countries. Nuclear scientists and technicians who lost their positions due to extensive nuclear disarmament may seek new opportunities in Third World countries, including North Korea.

North Korea has attempted to smuggle Russian nuclear and missile specialists into its country. On December 8, 1992, thirty-six Russian nuclear and missile specialists were detained by Russian security agents at the Moscow Airport shortly before their departure for Pyongyang. These specialists had been hired by North Korea at monthly salaries of \$1,500—\$3,000 to help the North Korean nuclear weapons program.⁵⁸ According to Larry Niksch of Congressional Research Service, Russian military officials confirmed the presence of Russian

55 *Chosun Ilbo*, May 26, 1994.

56 It was published again by *Izvestiya* of June 24, 1994.

57 *The Korean Herald*, June 25, 1994.

58 KBS-1 Radio network in Korean, December 20, 1992, in FBIS-EAS-92-245, December 21, 1992, p. 32.

nuclear scientists inside North Korea in January 1994.⁵⁹ Furthermore, there have been numerous reports that North Korea smuggled plutonium from Russia.

Pyongyang's Missile Development

Along with Pyongyang's nuclear capability, its development of long-range missiles capable of delivering weapons of mass destruction is a critical issue for Northeast Asian security.

After the SCUD missile test with a range of 600 miles in 1993, Pyongyang's test-fired a three-stage Taepodong 1 (TD-1) missile, which flew 1,500 KM over Japan on August 31, 1998. This testing proved that the DPRK has acquired a medium-range missile capability, and the surrounding countries reacted to this event with great alarm. North Korea's test firing of TD-1 appears to have been intended to strengthen its bargaining position *vis-à-vis* the U.S. and to demonstrate its missile products for potential buyers. According to Chinese sources, TD-1 relied on Japanese technology acquired by North Korea from third countries and was developed with the help of experts from the former Soviet republics, especially Ukraine.⁶⁰

After the test firing of TD-1, the U.S., Japan, and South Korea intensified pressures on North Korea to discontinue its missile program. But North Korea has maintained that it will continue its missile program as a matter of sovereign right. With regard to missile exports, North Korea is willing to discontinue the sale of missiles and missile technology if the U.S. provides adequate financial compensation (\$500 million a year) and lifts economic sanctions against it. The following commentary by the Korea Central News Agency (KCNA) on June 16, 1998,

59 Larry A. Niksch, Congressional Research Service Reports 91141: North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Program, December 12, 1996

60 *The DPRK Report*, No. 15 (November-December 1998) at <http://www.nautilus.org/pub/ftp/napsnet/RussiaDPRK/DPRK_Report_15.txt>.

clearly conveys these messages:

For us, the missile issue is a matter that has to do with the autonomy of the nation and its people's right to life. And the consistent principle of the military policy of this republic's government is to produce arms on its own and to deploy them to preserve the security of the nation and the people as long as military threats [to North Korea] from outside remain. We shall continue to develop, test, and deploy missiles, based on this principle.

Now when missiles of the United States, which is in a state of belligerence with us, are targeted at the territories of this nation, what is the reason why we cannot develop and deploys missiles to match them? The issue of this country stopping its development of missiles is something that should be discussed only after a peace treaty has been concluded between the DPRK and the United States, and the United States' military threats to this nation have been completely removed.

We are exporting missiles, but we are doing that to obtain foreign currency necessary for us. With the United States having isolated this country economically for more than a half century so far, sources of foreign currency for us are very limited. As such, the export of missiles is an unavoidable choice for us. If the United States really wants us to stop exporting the missiles, it should lift the economic sanctions without any further delay and move toward paying compensation for economic losses (of North Korea) that will arise from its half in exporting the missiles.

In contrast to the U.S., Japan, and South Korea, Russia plays down North Korea's missile threat. Russian leaders view that North Korea's missile capability does not pose a global threat. During his visit to Seoul in September 1999, Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeev stated: "North Korea's missile program is 'a sensitive area,' but 'we do not see a global danger in the tests as such'"⁶¹ Russian leaders also suspect that the United States and Japan are exaggerating its danger while using the missile issue as an excuse to push forward a new Japanese-

61 Interfax, September 2, 1999, in FBIS-EAS-1999-0902.

U.S. military alliance and developing a Theater Missile Defense (TMD) anti-missile system in Northeast Asia.⁶²

Like China, Russia is opposed to the imposition of international sanctions upon and the use of force against North Korea as the means to resolve North Korea's nuclear issue. Russians point out that any attempt to coerce North Korea with sanctions and force will not change North Korea's behavior but will only heighten tensions on the Korean peninsula. Moscow holds that tensions on the Korean peninsula should be resolved through political dialogue and peaceful means.⁶³

VI. Obstacles to Pyongyang-Moscow Relations

A number of circumstances led Russia to take the initiative in normalizing relations with North Korea. The October 1994 U.S.-North Korean Nuclear Agreed Framework served as a catalyst for a general reorientation of Russian policy toward the two Koreas. Russian policy-makers felt slighted when Russia was completely ignored and excluded from the nuclear deal, and were particularly bitter that Russia was not even consulted. Russia complained that its legitimate economic interests in North Korea were completely sacrificed. It concluded that it can only regain respect from its Northeast Asian neighbors by reestablishing strong ties with Pyongyang while maintaining a cooperative partnership with Seoul.

Another sobering event for Russia was the four-way talks proposal. On April 16, 1996, Presidents Kim Young Sam and Bill Clinton jointly proposed to North Korea and China that four-party (South and North Korea, the U.S. and China) peace talks be held at the earliest possible

62 "Hype Over North Korea Rockets Spurs Tensions Moscow," *Interfax*, September 3, 1999, in FBIS-EAS-1999-0903.

63 Moscow Voice of Russia World Service in Korean 1200 GMT 27 Jul 99, in FBIS-SOV-1999-0729.

date without any conditions. Russia expressed regret at its exclusion from the proposed four-party peace talks. Russia favors a multilateral conference of all parties concerned as a mechanism to create a new peace regime on the Korean Peninsula to replace the 1953 Armistice Agreement.⁶⁴

Despite Russia's sincere efforts at restoring bilateral ties, the Moscow-Pyongyang relationship is far from close, due mainly to a lack of enthusiasm on the part of North Korea. Pyongyang's primary concern has been improved relations with the U.S. High on Pyongyang's diplomatic agenda are ensuring its regime survival through diplomatic negotiations with the U.S. and improving its dismal economic situation through economic and technological cooperation with the U.S. Therefore, North Korea has been preoccupied with its relations with the U.S., and its relations with Russia are of secondary importance. Unlike the U.S., Russia has nothing substantial to offer to the DPRK due to its own economic woes.

The formal power transition in North Korea, which lasted more than four years, further impeded an early rapprochement between the DPRK and Russia. After Kim Il Sung's death in July 1994, Kim Jong Il was in a three-year mourning refusing to formally assume power positions. During the three years, he ruled the DPRK in the capacity of the Supreme Commander of the armed forces. He was finally elected General Secretary of the Korean Workers' Party in October 1997 and Chairman of the National Defense Commission (NDC) in September 1998. During this transitional period, Kim Jong Il did not take new foreign

64 For Russia's multilateral conference proposals on the Korea questions, see Seung-Ho Joo, "Russia and Korea," in Bae Ho Hahn and Chae-Jin Lee (eds.) *The Korean Peninsula and the Major Powers* (The Sejong Institute & the Keck Center, Claremont McKenna College, 1998), pp. 108-112; Valentin Moiseev, "On the Korean Settlement," *International Affairs* (Moscow), vol. 43, no. 3 (1997), pp. 68-72. Evgueni Bajanov, "A Russian Perspective on Korean Peace and Security," *Northeast Peace and Security Network Special Report* (July 28, 1997) at http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/special_reports/.

policy initiatives *vis-à-vis* Russia, while staying out of the diplomatic limelight.

The Negative portrayal of the Pyongyang regime by the Russian mass media has irritated the North Korean leadership and further strained Moscow-Pyongyang relations. For example, the showing of the TV program, “Democratic People’s Republic of Korea ‘The Red Monarch’ and ‘Successor to the Throne’” by the Russian media on 29 June and July 6, 1997 invited a strong protest from North Korea toward the Russian government. Pyongyang demanded that the Russian government intervene to stop the broadcast of these highly critical TV programs concerning Kim Il Sung and the North Korean regime. The Russian Foreign Ministry, however, refused to intervene noting that it “has nothing to do with those television programs and does not bear responsibility for them.”⁶⁵

Russia’s military cooperation (particularly, arms sales and military technology cooperation) with the ROK invokes anger and bitterness from Pyongyang.⁶⁶ As part of debt repayment to South Korea, Russia has provided arms and military hardware worth \$240 million to South Korea, including 33 T-80U tanks, 33 BMP-3 armored personnel vehicles, 70 Metis-M movable tactical rocket systems and 50 Igla air defense systems. Over 60 South Korean officers have been trained at institutions of the Russian Defense Ministry.⁶⁷ Russia is also keen on exporting sophisticated weapons to South Korea such as S-300 anti-ballistic missiles, SU-35 fighter planes, and Amur-class diesel submarines. Pyongyang views increased military ties between Moscow and Seoul with indignation.

65 Andrey Kirillov, “Foreign Ministry Distances Itself From TV Programs on DPRK,” in ITAR-TASS World Service, July 9, 1997, FBIS-SOV-97-190.

66 For ROK-Russia military cooperation, see Tae-Hwan Kwak and Seung-Ho Joo, “Military Cooperation Between Russia and South Korea,” *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 8 (1999), pp. 147-178.

67 Interfax, September 3, 1999, in FBIS-SOV-1999-0903.

Russia, in turn, has some reservations about Pyongyang. Pyongyang's involvement in criminal activities inside Russia reinforces negative images of North Korea among Russians. On a state level, North Korea has been engaged in drug trafficking in Russia, and Russia's public security authorities have confirmed that North Korea's Workers' Party operates opium farms inside its country.⁶⁸ According to a Russian news report, illegal drugs were smuggled into Vladivostok from Chegdomyn and Tyrma in Khabarovsk Kray, where North Koreans were engaged in timber operations. North Koreans used the money from the sale of drugs to purchase photographic paper, pumps, electric motors, and chain saws, and sent them back to North Korea.⁶⁹ Initially, North Korean citizens arrested for drug trafficking were not punishable by Russian laws, but were sent back to their homeland according a bilateral agreement between the DPRK and Russia. Since the mid-1990s, North Korean criminals have been prosecuted in Russia. Needless to say, North Korea's illegal activities do not play well in Russia's media and dampen cooperative mood between the two countries.

Pyongyang's debt to Moscow is another source of friction. North Korea owed the Soviet Union about 3.3 billion hard currency Rubles (rubles used in the past for international settlements; one ruble equaled \$1.6). North Korea incurred over two-thirds of the debt (about 2.4 billion Rubles) through the purchase of arms and military equipment from the Soviet Union.⁷⁰ As the legal successor to the Soviet Union, Russia has demanded Pyongyang's assumption of the debt responsibility. According to a Russian Foreign Ministry official, as of

68 Fedor Gurko, "The Korean Syndrome: Drugs Are Arriving in Maritime Kray Through the Channel of the Special [Intelligence] Services," *Interfaks-AiF*, June 16-22, 1997, No. 24, pp. 1,5 in FBIS-SOV-97-147-S, June 22, 1997; KBS-1 Television Network, November 14, 1996 in FBIS-TDD-96-033-L, November 14, 1996.

69 Fedor Gurko, *Interfaks-AiF*, June 16-22, 1997, No 24, pp 1,5, in FBIS-SOV-97-147-S

70 Vladimir B. Yakubovsky, "Economic Relations between Russia and DPRK," *Korea and World Affairs*, Vol. 20, No. 3, (Fall 1996), p. 461.

February 2000, North Korea's debt to Russia amounted to approximately 3.8 billion Rubles.⁷¹ During the second session of the Russia-North Korea Joint Economic Commission, North Korea for the first time officially promised in principle to repay its debt to Russia. Still, Russia and the DPRK have failed to agree on the details of debt repayment even after numerous talks on this issue. North Korea's insolvency toward Russia continues to be a main obstacle in the improvement of bilateral relations.

VII. Conclusions

The DPRK and Russia normalized bilateral relations by signing a new "treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness, and Cooperation" in February 2000. Moscow's rapprochement with Pyongyang means the shift from the *de facto* "one-Korea" policy to "two-Korea" policy. Shortly after the collapse of the Soviet empire, Russian leaders had expected that the North Korean regime would face the same fate as that of the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries disappearance into the "dustbin of history." They predicted that Korean unification would occur in the near future and on South Korean terms. At the time it seemed logical that Russia should cultivate a cooperative partnership with Seoul, while disregarding Pyongyang. Pyongyang still survives, however, and it does not show signs of imminent collapse. Given the situation, the Kremlin reconsidered its policy toward the Korean Peninsula, and moved to reestablish a normal state-to-state relationship with Pyongyang.

Russia will seek a balanced relationship (or even-handed approach) with the two Koreas, while separating politics and economics. In other words, Russia will maintain a neutral position between the ROK and

71 *Choong-Ang Ilbo*, February 12, 2000.

the DPRK as regards political issues particularly relating to inter-Korean affairs. On certain international matters, such as U.S.-led UN sanctions against North Korea over nuclear weapons and missile issue, Russia may exercise veto power. Russia, however, will continue to support unequivocally nuclear non-proliferation on the Korean peninsula, while championing a peaceful and diplomatic solution to the Korean question and North Korea's nuclear and missile development issue.

As far as economic (trade and investment) and military relations (arms sales and technology cooperation) are concerned, Seoul is by far a more important partner to Russia than Pyongyang is. Therefore, Moscow will continue to lean heavily toward Seoul in economic and military cooperation, hoping that Seoul will play a central role in the development of the Russian Far East and Siberia. Barring Russia's massive economic aid to North Korea, bilateral economic cooperation will not increase drastically. Given Russia's economic difficulties and North Korea's inability to repay its debt owed to Russia, we cannot expect a breakthrough in the economic relationship in the near future.

Therefore, Russia's even-handed approach toward the two Koreas will be most visible in political relations. By separating political issues from economic benefits, Moscow will try to enhance its influence and prestige in Korean affairs and at the same time continue to intensify economic cooperation with Seoul particularly in connection with the Nakhodka Korean industrial complex and the Koviktinskoe gas pipeline project.

Will Moscow increase its influence over Pyongyang and then enhance its influence on the Korean peninsula? Moscow-Pyongyang relations will not revert to the "old" ties, which were predicated upon ideological unity and military alliance. Instead they are likely to develop into normal neighborly states. If Moscow decides to provide modern weapons and supplies as well as fuel (gas and oil) to Pyongyang in favorable terms such as credit, bilateral political ties are likely to rapidly warm up. North Korea's weapons and military equipment are based

on the Russian weapons system and North Korea's military relies on a stable supply of parts of weapons and equipment as well as sophisticated military hardware. Moscow can use the dependent relationship to control Pyongyang's behavior. Pyongyang-Moscow military cooperation may intensify if they share a common threat or enemy. The development of the Theater Missile Defense system by the U.S. and Japan or a surgical military operation against North Korean missile targets by the U.S. or Japan may bring Moscow and Pyongyang closer militarily.