

The Development of Russian-South Korean Relations under Yeltsin: In Search of Partnership Relations based on Treaties?

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South Korea has become one of the priorities of Russian foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific region under Yeltsin. This has resulted in the conclusion of several important bilateral treaties between the sides which demonstrated how their previous relations based on the Soviet system changed into new relations based on the post-Soviet system during Yeltsin's first presidential term in 1991-96. Despite Russia's enthusiastic interest towards South Korea, the latter country, as a middle [rising] power in this region, did not concede Russia's diplomatic intentions when developing their new post-Soviet bilateral relations. This has demonstrated Russia's failure to conduct an effective foreign policy towards the Korean peninsula. By focusing on the issue of bilateral treaties between the sides, we will be able to see more clearly [and in more depth] the changes of Russia's Policy towards South Korea and its subsequent bilateral relations in the post-Soviet era. The paper argues that Russia's policy towards South Korea during this period had to be gradually reactive with several periodic stages although Russia emphasized its relations with South Korea and looked for a partnership relations based on treaties in the post-Soviet era.

Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia faced an unprecedented challenge in forging new relationships in Northeast Asia. It had to transform the previous Soviet ideological basis into non-ideological post-Soviet reality on the Korean Peninsula. Russia was no longer allied with North Korea, and was pursuing normal diplomatic relations with South Korea, despite the latter retaining a Cold War-era relationship with the US.

In the post-Soviet era, Russia was forced to develop new policies and relations with both Koreas, because, unlike other regions, the Korean peninsula remained divided as it had throughout the Cold War.¹ Regardless of the dramatic changes in Europe, the basic structure of the Cold War system first established in the wake of World War Two continued to govern the Korean peninsula in the post-Soviet era.² Ultimately, this led Russia to a Peninsula policy that was in constant flux, rather than remaining firm.

Russia's policy towards South Korea, and the subsequent bilateral relations, evolved throughout Yeltsin's first presidential term (Dec. 1991- Jul. 1996).³ In general, Western analysts of Russian-Korean affairs tend to examine separately several key political,

¹ For an account of the meaning of the post-Soviet era towards the Korean Peninsula, see Lee Man-woo and Richard Mansbach, *The Changing Order in Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula* (Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1993).

² As Bruce Cumings points out, "the legacy of the Cold War still persisted on the Korean Peninsula after the collapse of the Soviet Union.. It is a Museum of that [Cold War] awful conflict." Michael Hogan, *The End of the Cold War: Its Meaning and Implications* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 98.

³ The author regards the starting point of Russian foreign policy as December 27, 1991, as South Korea immediately recognized the independent Russia on that date, instantly transforming Soviet-South Korean relations into Russian-South Korean relations. For a more detailed account of the starting point of Russian foreign policy, see Mark Webber, "The Emergence of the Foreign Policy of Russian Federation," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 1993. Teresa Johnson and Steven Miller, *Russian Security after the Cold War: Seven Views from Moscow* (Washington: Brassey's, 1994).

security, and economic issues when explaining their bilateral relations.⁴ Thus, much of this work tends to be descriptive rather than systematic in its approach.

By focusing on some important elements of bilateral treaties between the sides, the development of Russia's policy towards South Korea and their relations becomes evident. Bilateral treaties between states can be an effective means to guide the relationship. Concluding treaties and conducting summit meetings are widely regarded as the pinnacle of diplomatic relations between states. International treaties and agreements are regarded as important devices in mutual relations. They can be instruments of stability or change; catalysts or moderators of political forces; and decentralizing or assimilating tools of progress. Normalization of treaties and ordered relations among different types of states may be adapted to serve all circumstances.⁵ This analytical approach reveals the 'political bargaining' and 'power struggle' apparent in Russian domestic politics over South Korean issues.⁶

⁴ Several articles and books provide valuable information on Russia's foreign policy towards the Korean Peninsula and their relations. Chung Il-yung (ed.), *Korea and Russia toward the 21st Century* (Seoul: The Sejong Institute, 1992). Peggy Meyer, "Gorbachev and Post-Gorbachev Policy towards the Korean Peninsula: the Impact of Changing Russian Perceptions," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 32, No. 8, 1992. Lee Chang-jae, *Hanro kyungchehyupryuk'ui hyonhwanggwwa kwache* [The Current Situation and the Issue of Russian-Korean Economic Cooperation] (Seoul: Hanruchinsunhyophoe, 1993). Jeong Kap-young (ed.), *Cooperation between Korea and Russia* (Seoul: The Institute of East and West Studies, 1993). Alvin Z. Rubinstein, "Russia and North Korea: the End of an Alliance?," *Korea and World Affairs*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1994. Vladimir S. Miasnikov, "Russian-South Korean Security Cooperation," *The Korean Journal of Defence Analysis*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1994. Joo Seung-ho, "Russian Policy on Korean Unification in the Post-Cold War Era," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 69, No. 1, 1996. A.N. Lan'kov, *Severnaia Koreia: Vchera i segodnia* (Moscow: Nauka, 1995).

⁵ To identify the various Soviet theories, practices, and policies associated with Soviet international agreements and treaties and to analyze those theories, practices, and policies in their own context and to contrast them, horizontally as well as vertically, among themselves, see Jan Triska and Robert Slusser, *The Theory, Law and Policy of Soviet Treaties* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962). For a detailed analysis of Soviet treaty diplomacy, see Arnold Beichman, *The Long Pretence: Soviet Treaty Diplomacy from Lenin to Gorbachev* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1991).

⁶ For the domestic power struggle among Russian elite, see Gordon M. Hahn, "Russia's

The development of bilateral treaties between Russia and South Korea, such as the treaty on basic relations between the two sides signed in 1992 (henceforth, the Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty) and the subsequent military treaties, demonstrates how relations might develop further in the post-Soviet era whilst simultaneously revealing the definite limitations of those relations. In other words, a comprehensive understanding of the development of major bilateral treaties, which embraced all the key political, economic, and security issues between the two sides, is key to understanding how Russia's South Korean policy developed and changed during these transformative years following the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

This paper aims to analyze the development of key political, military treaties, and economic treaties between the two sides according to chronological sequence. This paper begins with a historical review of previous relations by focusing on bilateral treaties, before moving on to analyze each development during Yeltsin's first presidential term. By then focusing on major bilateral treaties between the two sides, the paper will demonstrate how Russia attempted to develop relations with South Korea in the post-Soviet era. The argument and analysis of development of Russian-South Korean relations is divided into the following sections⁷:

Polarized Political Spectrum," *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 43, No. 3, 1996. Glenn Chafetz, "The Struggle for a National Identity in Post-Soviet Russia," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 111, No. 4, 1996-97. For example, for the power struggle in Russian government and the resulting changes in Russian foreign policy towards Moldova periodically, see Kate Litvak, "The Role of Political Competition and Bargaining in Russian Foreign Policy: the Case of Russian Policy toward Moldova," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 1996.

⁷ Russian elections can be regarded as an integral part of the fundamental transformation of a Soviet system into a democratic one. Reflecting Yeltsin's gradual power consolidation in Russian politics, Russia's Korean policy can be divided into the following three stages. In this respect, especially, the December 1993 and the December 1995 Russian parliamentary elections played an important role in changing the momentum of Russia's domestic and foreign policy. On the importance and functions of Russian elections, see Jon H. Pammett and Joan Debardeleben, "The

- Towards the Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty and Preliminary Military Treaty Relations: In Search of a Partnership Based on the Political Treaty? (Dec. 1991 - Dec. 1993);
- Toward the Military Cooperation Treaty after the 1993 Parliamentary Election: In Search of a Complementary Partnership? (Dec. 1993 - Dec. 1995); and
- The Development of Bilateral Treaties between the Two Sides after the 1995 Parliamentary Election: A Shaky Partnership? (Dec. 1995 - Jul. 1996)

This paper argues that Russia's policy towards South Korea during this period was 'reactive,'⁸ evidently lacking a firm and consistent consensus within the top leadership. Despite this problem, the Yeltsin Administration increasingly and actively tried to establish a new and mutually beneficial partnership, as well as a new legal foundation for relations during this transitional period.

In Search of Economic Partnership? (1985-91)

Russian-Korean relations originated in the mid-19th Century, when Imperial Russia and the Korean Kingdom officially started to develop relations based on the Treaty of Trade and Commerce concluded on July 7, 1884.⁹ As a result of the Russian-Japanese

Meaning of Elections in Transitional Democracies: Evidence from Russia and Ukraine," *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 1996. Stephen White, *Elections and Voters in Post-Communist Russia* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 1998).

⁸ In this paper, 'reactive' is taken to mean responding rather than taking the initiative. In other words, the basic nature of Russia's policy towards the Korean Peninsula was responding to both internal and external influences, although Russia did attempt to take actively the initiative during this period (Dec. 1991 - Jul. 1996). By contrast, Gorbachev's Korean policy can be described as 'active,' because he led both domestic and international policies towards the Korean Peninsula.

⁹ For the development of Imperial Russian-Korean relations, for example, see Kim Eugene and Han-kyo Kim, *Korea and the Politics of Imperialism, 1876-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

War (1904-05), however, Imperial Russia and its successor the Soviet Union had no official relations with Korea until the end of World War Two.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union principally developed its bilateral relations with North Korea on the Korean Peninsula on the basis of the treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Soviet Union and North Korea signed in 1961 (henceforth, the 1961 Soviet-North Korean Treaty).¹⁰ During the Gorbachev era, however, Soviet Korean policy gradually began to concentrate on building good bilateral relations with South Korea under the New Political Thinking. Conversely, Gorbachev's Korean policy still sought to retain influence over North Korea and observe the 1961 Soviet-North Korean Treaty. This meant that the Soviet Union under Gorbachev was attempting for the first time to establish active bilateral relation with both Koreas on the Korean Peninsula.

It is therefore essential to examine the wider context of emerging Soviet-South Korean bilateral relations when analyzing treaty issues, which during the Gorbachev era developed from economic agreements towards political ones. This formed the basis of the Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty, one of the most important bilateral treaties between the two sides in the post-Soviet era.

These developments in Soviet-South Korean relations finally resulted in diplomatic normalization in 1990, at which point the former Soviet Union became the first major power to recognize both independent nations on the Korean Peninsula. Thereafter, until the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, there were enormous bilateral developments between the two sides towards the conclusion of the political treaty (variously referred to as the "Treaty of Good Neighborhood, Partnership, and Cooperation between

¹⁰ It should be noted that in the 1970s, for the first time, the Soviet Union and South Korea made personal contacts and exchanges at the unofficial level.

the Soviet Union and South Korea” or the “Treaty on Good-Neighborliness and Cooperation between the Soviet Union and South Korea”). In other words, a solid foundation was laid for the Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty during the late Gorbachev period - although this political treaty was never concluded due to the sudden attempted coup in Moscow in August 1991. There are two distinct stages leading to the political treaty: pre- and post-diplomatic normalization.

These pre-diplomatic normalization efforts focused on improving Soviet-South Korean economic and non-governmental relations as a precondition for diplomatic normalization. In other words, it is clear that these steps became a collective foundation for the forthcoming Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty in the post-Soviet era.

In Search of a Partnership based on the Political Treaty? (Dec. 1991 - Dec. 1993)

Russia largely followed Gorbachev’s late Korean policy, which was centered on economic interests on the Peninsula. To this end, Russia obviously placed priority on the development of relations with South Korea. In other words, Russia tried to develop its relations with South Korea from diplomatic normalization (1990) to partnership relations in the post-Soviet era. This can be separated into two stages: (1) the conclusion of the Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty; and (2) the development of bilateral agreements on military cooperation between Russia and South Korea.

The Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty was concluded during Yeltsin’s visit to Seoul in November 1992. Throughout this period (Dec. 1991 - Dec. 1993), it was obvious that bilateral relations were fully focused on preparing and concluding this political

treaty. Above all, high-level political-economic contacts between the two sides were frequent and primarily designed to discuss and coordinate the Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty, which was scheduled to be signed in the autumn (September) of 1992.¹¹ Notably, in March 1992, Russian Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev paid an official visit to South Korea. This marked the first serious phase of the preparations for Yeltsin's official visit. By the time of Kozyrev's visit to South Korea, the two countries had agreed the basic principles of the Treaty.¹²

There were further discussions on the draft of the Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty when the South Korean Foreign Minister visited Russia in June 1992. During the meeting, the two foreign ministers finalized almost all of the text of a bilateral treaty on their basic relations.¹³ On November 18-20, 1992, Yeltsin finally paid an official visit to South Korea to formalize and strengthen the ties developed in the later Gorbachev years, and also to resolve the existing several problems that remained between the two countries.¹⁴ As scheduled, on November 19, 1992, the two sides signed the historic Russian-South Korean Basic

¹¹ Yeltsin's visit to South Korea was scheduled for September 1992, together with his visit to Japan. This was cancelled at the very last moment, and Yeltsin only visited South Korea in November 1992.

¹² He stated in Seoul that "... The forthcoming summit will lead to friendly, neighborly, and regular relations of new quality between democratic Russia and South Korea, which will be consolidated in the form of a political treaty. This treaty will be called to bring our relations to the level which we have now with Western countries." "Kozyrev Gives News Conference on ROK Trip," *TASS International Service*, March 19, 1992 in FBIS-SOV 92-055, p. 31.

¹³ It consisted of a preamble and 14 clauses, which stated the two countries will continuously develop their cooperative relations as friendly nations. The Treaty prohibited use of military force or threats between the two countries and said that they would resolve all conflicts by peaceful means. "Text of Relations Pact Approved," *Yonhap*, June 29, 1992 in FBIS-SOV 92-126, June 30, 1992, pp. 18-19.

¹⁴ This was the first visit to Seoul, the capital of South Korea, by a head of the Russian Federation. No Soviet leader visited North Korea during the Soviet era. South Korea also became the first Northeast Asian country that Yeltsin visited in the post-Soviet era.

Treaty, which provided a framework for both countries in the post-Soviet era.¹⁵

The Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty committed the two sides to refrain from using force and to settle all disputes by peaceful means in accordance with the UN Charter. They agreed to hold regular meetings between the heads of state and members of the government to discuss bilateral relations and international issues of mutual concern. The two nations also signed an agreement on cultural cooperation and an agreement eliminating double taxation of incomes, in addition to a Memorandum of Mutual Understanding for 1993, facilitating the first direct exchanges between the Defense Ministries of Russia and South Korea.¹⁶

The conclusion of the Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty demonstrated the fundamental changes in Russian perceptions and goals in her foreign policy not only towards the Peninsula, but also to the international environment of Northeast Asia in the post-Soviet era. Firstly, it clearly indicated Russia's pro-South Korean stance towards the Korean Peninsula, because this Treaty was concluded within a year of the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹⁷ In other words, the negotiations for this political treaty, initiated by Gorbachev and Roh during the late Soviet era, were continued

¹⁵ In late April 1993, the Russian Parliament ratified "the Russia-South Korean Basic Treaty." In presenting the document Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Boris Kolokolov, stressed that the Treaty laid the foundations for qualitatively new relations between the two countries, not only good-neighborly, but those of partners as well. "ROK Treaty Ratified," *Radio Rossi Network*, April 29, 1993 in FBIS-SOV 93-082, April 30, 1993, p. 39.

¹⁶ *Pravda*, November 24, 1992, p. 3.

¹⁷ Yeltsin stated that "this [his visit to Seoul] was the right step, and the country was chosen correctly since it sets an example, particularly in reforms, and we can learn from it." "Yeltsin Sums Up ROK Trip," *IRAR-TASS*, November 20, 1992 in FBIS-SOV 92-226, November 23, 1992, p. 14. *Komsomolskaya Pravda* reported that Yeltsin's recent visit to South Korea made it possible to practically demonstrate new approaches in Russian foreign policy in the Far East and to partially lift the veil concealing Russia's true interests and role in the Korean problem. "Policy on Korean Unification Viewed," in FBIS-SOV 92-241, December 15, 1992, p. 20.

by the Russian leadership after the Soviet disintegration. The result was full-scale diplomatic friendship and a political treaty, comparable to the 1961 Soviet-North Korean Treaty.

Secondly, Russia became the first major power to enter full-scale political agreements with both Koreas. Thus, Russia began to develop parallel bilateral relations based on political treaties with for the first time.¹⁸ This gave Russia a superior position on the Korean Peninsula, by comparison to other major powers in Northeast Asia, such as China, Japan, and the US. The conclusion of the Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty also led to initial changes in bilateral relations among the other major powers and the two Koreas (such as the US-North Korean relations and Chinese-South Korean relations). In this respect, the conclusion of the Basic Treaty became a symbol of the end of the Cold War atmosphere in Northeast Asia.

In spite of the historic conclusion of the Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty at the first Russian-South Korean summit in Seoul in 1992, neither side was satisfied with the results. In particular, preparations had not been smooth for either the Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty or Yeltsin's state visit to South Korea. For example, the existing 1961 Soviet-North Korean Treaty had become a serious obstacle to concluding the Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty. In fact, from the beginning of 1992, the South Korean side demanded that Russia renounce the 1961 Soviet-North Korean Treaty as a pre-condition for the expansion of the economic relationship. In other words, South Korea demanded Russia break its bond with North Korea, which at least on paper retained the character of a military alliance.¹⁹

¹⁸ Alexei Bogaturov stated that "the Treaty signed in November 1992, is an effective political balance to the Soviet and North Korean Treaty of 1961 that is subject to renegotiation and alteration as is stipulated by its provisions." Alexei Bogaturov, "Russia in Northeast Asia: Setting a New Agenda," *Korea and World Affairs*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1993.

Furthermore, although Russia seemingly accepted South Korea's request on the issue of the 1961 Soviet-North Korean Treaty, the Russian leadership remained divided into two groups on treaty issues: pro-South Korean and pro-North Korean supporters. The sudden, last minute cancellation of Yeltsin's visit to South Korea and Japan, scheduled for mid-September 1992, may indicate serious disagreements among the Russian leadership over Yeltsin's trip and the forthcoming political treaty with South Korea (in addition to the Russian dispute with Japan over the Northern Islands). The Russian leadership seemed to need more time to reach a solid consensus on the issue of the 1961 Soviet-North Korean Treaty before concluding the Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty, illustrating Russia's domestic power struggle over the diplomatic issue. Indeed, by the middle of September 1992, the Russian leadership was still unable to reach consensus over the issue of the 1961 Soviet-North Korean Treaty while pursuing the political treaty with South Korea.²⁰

Given the uncertainties and unpredictability of the domestic scene in Russia, however, it was not surprising that there was no consensus on the conclusion of the Russian-South Korean Treaty. Yeltsin and his close [reform-minded] associates generally continued to support the *de facto* abrogation of the 1961 Soviet-North Korean Treaty. In the middle of August 1992, for example,

¹⁹ For example, the South Korean Foreign Minister's visit to Moscow in June 1992 was intended to coincide with Russia's confirmation of the abolition of the 1961 Soviet-North Korean Treaty, which was already subject to reinterpretation.

²⁰ Yeltsin's visit to South Korea was scheduled for September 16-18, 1992. Most Western analysts on Russian-Asian affairs suggest Russia's domestic constraints related to the Northern territorial dispute with Japan were the real cause for the postponement of this trip. Peggy Meyer, "Moscow's Relations with Tokyo: Domestic Obstacles to a Territorial Agreement," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 33, No. 10, 1993. Yakov Zinberg and Reinhard Drifte, "Chaos in Russia and the Territorial Dispute with Japan," *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1993. In other words, little attention was paid to the issue of the 1961 Soviet-North Korean Treaty (and also other Korean issues). The author, however, suggests the issue of the 1961 Treaty was equally important as the Russian-Japanese Northern territory dispute.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister G. Kunadze stated that:

The Treaty that has been prepared for signing is a document drawn up in full accordance with the present-day requirements of international law. In terms of format it is not a treaty of alliance - that is, it is not aimed against any third party. Russia and South Korea pledge to consider each other as friendly states. We are convinced that the Treaty will pave the way still further for mutually advantageous cooperation.²¹

Georgiy Toloraya, chief of the Russian Foreign Ministry Korea Department also stated that:

The Treaty, which is intended to crown the Russian President's stay in Seoul, will consolidate the process of gravitation between our two countries, which in three years have traveled the path from mutual non-recognition and hostility to friendly partnership.²²

Nevertheless, the Russian Foreign Ministry continued to regard the 1961 Soviet-North Korean Treaty as active, despite the President's words.²³ Furthermore, in response to South Korea's demand, some within the Russian Foreign Ministry felt that as a great power, Russia should not bow to such ultimatums concerning its relationship with North Korea.²⁴ These officials considered that it was in Russia's interests for the 1961 Soviet-North Korean Treaty to continue in some form in the post-Soviet era.

These problems all arose from two different national aims for the outcome of the Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty. On the one hand, Russia's main motivation for concluding the Russian-South

²¹ *Izvestiya*, August 14, 1992, p. 6.

²² *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, August 28, 1992, p. 7.

²³ The Russian Deputy Foreign Minister G. Kunadze stated that "Moscow and Pyongyang are long-time partners in various areas of human activity. And we believe there is no need to sever our relations. On the contrary, we should strive to preserve and strengthen the good-neighborliness on which the 1961 Soviet-North Korean state-to-state treaty is based," *Izvestiya*, August 13, 1992, p. 6.

²⁴ *Izvestiya*, July 31, 1992, p. 3.

Korean Basic Treaty was economic interest. Conversely, South Korea's main motivation was political: Russia still had positive influence over North Korea, and in particular on the nuclear issue. These differing interests gradually led to a growing skepticism among South Koreans over relations with Russia. For the Russians, the Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty had already produced many difficulties for relations between Russia and North Korea at the expense of its relations with South Korea, although superficially the Yeltsin trip to South Korea was quite successful, especially in terms of economic cooperation.²⁵ Based on these different positions and interests, the results of concluding the Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty and the first Russian-South Korean summit was inevitably limited.

Despite several problems between the two sides, after the conclusion of the Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty in 1992, bilateral relations gradually expanded towards the conclusion of agreements and accords in the military field. The focus of Russian-South Korean relations increasingly expanded from solely political relations to include military ones. Accordingly, active military contacts and exchange visits occurred between the two sides during this period; previously unthinkable during the Soviet era. For example, in early October 1992, an official Russian delegation, headed by Andrei Kokoshin, Russian First Deputy Defense Minister, arrived in Seoul. This was the first visit by a Russian military leader to South Korea. General Yi Yang-ho, Chairman of the South Korean Armed Forces Joint Chiefs of Staff, visited

²⁵ Yeltsin stated that "in my view, this visit has at least a 99 percent of success." In particular, he emphasized the result of economic cooperation with South Korea. He stated that "major projects worth a total of about US\$20 to \$30 billion have been considered. For example, the construction of a gas pipeline from the Republic of Sakha [Yakutia] to South Korea." Since Korea lacks the appropriate dock facilities, it is planned to lay this gas pipeline across North Korea, for which it steadfastly refused permission for 20 years. The President stated the following in this connection. "A representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was in Moscow; we obtained only verbal agreement for laying the gas pipeline," *Izvestiya*, November 19, 1992, pp. 1 and 4.

Russia in September 1993 to strengthen mutual understanding and organize a military exchange between the two countries.²⁶ Furthermore, the possibility of selling Russian arms to South Korea was under discussion.²⁷

During the 1st Russian-South Korean summit in Seoul in November 1992, the two Ministers of Defense signed the Memorandum of Understanding and Measures to Develop Ties between the Defense Ministries of Russia and South Korea in 1993. Under this Memorandum, the two countries commenced the first direct military contacts. The military Memorandum envisaged delegation exchanges at the level of Defense Ministers, Deputy Ministers, and heads of General Staff, and visits by representatives of military schools and naval vessels.²⁸ It should be emphasized that during the first summit in November 1992, Yeltsin assured South Korea that Russia would discontinue the provision of military assistance to North Korea,²⁹ and supported South Korea's demand that North Korea should allow international inspections of its nuclear facilities.³⁰

²⁶ *Krasnaya Zvezda*, August 31, 1993, p. 3.

²⁷ When the Russian Vice Premier Alexander Shokhin visited Seoul in August 1993, he told South Korean officials that Russia was ready to offer South Korea its most advanced weapons and related systems as a way to pay off debts. Alexander Shokhin said it would be a mistake for South Korea to buy US-made Patriot missiles instead of the Russian S-300 anti-missile system. He also stated that Russia hoped to supply South Korea with defensive weapons to pay the principal and interest on US\$1.56 billion of soft loans extended by the state. The South Korean government rejected this offer to provide weapons to South Korea to repay the principal and overdue interest on loans, *Japan Times*, August 29, 1993, p. 5.

²⁸ According to Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev, the two Defense Ministers agreed to extend exchanges to the military-technical sphere. He pointed to a possibility of the participation of Russian and South Korean representatives in the two countries' military exercises as observers. "Defense Minister Sign Memorandum," *ITAR-TASS*, November 20, 1992 in FBIS-SOV 92-225, November 20, 1992, p. 12.

²⁹ Yeltsin said that Russia will discontinue any military assistance to North Korea. "No More Military Aid to DPRK," *ITAR-TASS*, November 19, 1992 in FBIS-SOV 92-224, November 19, 1992, p. 10.

³⁰ Russia called on North Korea to join an international convention on non-proliferation of chemical weapons and agree to inter-Korean inspections of nuclear facilities.

These measures described the fundamentals of Russian-South Korean military relations.

Military cooperation between the two sides under the Memorandum of Understanding had two significant implications. Firstly, the atmosphere of the Cold War on the Korean Peninsula seemed to be fading. In the post-Soviet era, the conclusion of bilateral political and military treaties signaled the intention of both sides to share the basic principles of the UN Charter and hold similar approaches to the problems of peace, disarmament, and building the new structure of multi-polar international relations as cooperative allied nations.

Secondly, the beginning of military cooperation based on the Memorandum of Understanding would inevitably lead to a focus on the 1961 Soviet-North Korean Treaty, which defined the relations between the former Soviet Union and North Korea as Cold War allies. As Russia neared conclusion of a military treaty with South Korea, it had to re-define relations with North Korea under the 1961 Soviet-North Korean Treaty.

Against this backdrop, Russian-South Korean military cooperation gained more momentum in 1993.³¹ In May, the signing of a Memorandum on Cooperation in Defense Industry between the South Korean Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Power-Engineering and the Russian Committee for the Defense Sectors of Industry signaled a specific step towards South Korean commercial involvement in transferring Russia's military-oriented factories to

"Yeltsin Sums Up ROK Trip," *IRAR-TASS*, November 20, 1992 in FBIS-SOV 92-226, November 23, 1992, p. 14.

³¹ Russian Deputy Foreign Minister A. Panov said "Seoul and Moscow will be starting full-scale exchange visits between military personnel this year (1993) in order to get acquainted with each other and explore possibilities for future cooperation under an agreement signed between their Defense Ministers in Seoul in November 1992," *The Korea Herald*, January 5, 1993, pp. 2 and 5.

peaceful production.³² In light of the new military cooperation, a Russian observer attended the joint US-South Korean “Team Spirit” military exercises for the first time in 1993. Russian Defense Minister Grachev stressed that in order to make practical steps in the military field it was necessary to set up working groups in the two Defense Ministries to plan events for the next year. His counterpart, General Lee noted that South Korea regarded Russia as a guarantor of stability in the Asia-Pacific Region (APR). The two sides agreed to conduct joint naval exercises.³³

Russia’s aims and interests in expanding its bilateral military cooperation with South Korea centered on two important factors: arms sales and conversion of defense industry. The Russian leadership did not hide its official intentions about arms sales³⁴ to South Korea because Russia was unable to repay its loans from South Korea.³⁵ In other words, Russia wanted to pay back its economic debts to South Korea in the form of [defensive] arms transfers to South Korea instead of in money-form. By concluding the military treaty with South Korea there would be no practical (or real) barriers to Russian arms sales to the ROK. In June 1993,

³² This document envisages cooperation between the two countries’ business communities in aerospace, electronics, precision machine-building, and new materials technologies. The two sides agreed to open information centers and forge direct links between the Korean Institute of Scientific-Technical Information and the All-Russian Institute of Inter-Sectoral Information. “Defense Industry Signs Cooperation Accords with ROK,” *Moscow ITAR-TASS*, May 24, 1993 in FBIS-SOV 93-099, May 25, 1993, p. 18.

³³ Vladimir S. Miasnikov, “Russian-South Korean Security Cooperation,” *The Korean Journal of Defence Analysis*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1994.

³⁴ For Russia’s arms sales in the post-Soviet era, see Igor Khripunov, “Russia’s Arms Trade in the Post-Cold War Period,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1994.

³⁵ When the Russian Vice Premier Alexander Shokhin visited Seoul in August 1993, he told South Korean officials that Russia was ready to offer South Korea its most advanced weapons and related systems as a way to pay off debts. He stated that “this [arms sales to South Korea] would enable us to solve several issues: firstly, to arm the South Korean army with very efficient types of defensive weapons and secondly, to resolve our own financial problems, including debts.” “Shokhin to Discusses Military-Technology Package in ROK,” *Radio Rossii Network*, August 22, 1993 in FBIS-SOV 93-161, August 23, 1993, p. 6.

for example, a South Korean official declared at the 3rd session of the Russian-Korean Committee for Scientific and Technical Cooperation that South Korea intended to purchase around 40 Russian high technologies.³⁶

Russia's interest in expanding bilateral ties with South Korea was also closely related to the conversion of its defense industry in the post-Soviet era.³⁷ Russia regarded South Korea as an ideal partner to assist in the conversion.³⁸ In 1992, the South Korean government considered Russian proposals for military cooperation, and selected a number of projects in six fields: astronautics and outer space research; communications; transport and ground-based equipment; shipbuilding and maritime equipment; chemical production and chemical materials; and products of general designation. These spheres of cooperation include production of aircraft, avionics, and testing equipment; small engines for pilot-less aircraft; development of super-solid materials; ground-to-ship and ship-to-ship missiles; computer software and communication facilities.³⁹

³⁶ "South Korea to Buy Russian High Technology," *ITAR-TASS*, June 3, 1993 in FBIS-SOV 93-106, June 4, 1993, p. 21.

³⁷ For the conversion of Russian defense industry, for example, see Laure Despres, "Conversion of the Defense Industry in Russia and Arms Exports to the South," *Communist Economies and Economic Transformation*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1994.

³⁸ For example, in September 1992, Aleksandr Titkin, the Russian Industry Minister explained that "South Korea has sophisticated technology in the field of consumer goods production, while in Russia vast capacities are being freed during conversion of the defense industry. At the same time, Russia has high technology in military production of a defensive character in which Seoul is interested." "Industry Minister Visit ROK, Signed Memorandum," *ITAR-TASS*, September 1, 1992 in FBIS-SOV 92-171, September 2, 1992, p. 8. In October 1992, Andrey Kokoshin, Russian First Deputy Defense Minister also stated that "there are favorable opportunities for the development of industrial and commercial cooperation between Moscow and Seoul, including implementation of Russian defense industry conversion programs." "Russian Military Delegation Arrives in ROK for Talks," *ITAR-TASS*, October 4, 1992 in FBIS-SOV 92-194, October 6, 1992, p. 13.

³⁹ L. Anosova and G. Matveyeva, *South Korea: View from Russia* (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, 1994).

In the meantime, South Korean interests in expanding bilateral military cooperation with Russia were mainly related to the political issue of North Korea. In other words, South Korea's interest in military treaties with Russia in the early 1990s related directly to the serious problem of North Korean nuclear development. Although there were some mutual advantages in military treaties, the development of Russian-South Korean military cooperation based on the Memorandum of Understanding remained heavily dependant on the US factors.⁴⁰ Moreover, regarding the conversion of Russia's defense industry, South Korean Minister for Science and Engineering, Kim Si-chung, stated at the 3rd session of Russian-Korean Committee for Scientific and Technical Cooperation in June 1993 that South Korea badly needed scientific information on research carried out in Russia. He pointed out that there was a serious information exchange gap.⁴¹

This demonstrated that although Russian-South Korean relations had been predominantly cordial and cooperative during this period, not everything was perfect. In 1993 the atmosphere in bilateral relations gradually began to deteriorate.⁴² There were many reasons for these problems during this period. Firstly, although there had been frequent high-level political contacts and the conclusion of political and military treaties between the two

⁴⁰ For example, in August 1992, Russian Vice Premier, Aleksandr Shokhin, in Seoul mentioned the US factor in military cooperation between the two sides, "since South Korean has a close politically ally the US, and it is difficult evidently for the South Korean leaders to take such decisions without consultations with the US... this deal [arms sales] should not upset the balance in Northeast Asia and in the APR." "Shokhin Discusses Possible Russian Arms Deal with ROK," *ITAR-TASS*, August 28, 1993 in FBIS-SOV 93-166, August 30, 1993, p. 19.

⁴¹ "South Korea to Buy Russian High Technology," *ITAR-TASS*, June 3, 1993 in FBIS-SOV 93-106, June 4, 1993, p. 21.

⁴² G. Kunadze, Deputy Foreign Minister and Ambassador-designate to South Korea (as in December 1993), stated that "...the three-year-long diplomatic relations with South Korea have been based on stable experiences. We can say that these three years have been a period of getting out of a certain 'vain dream' and excessive expectations..." "Ambassador-Designate to ROK Views Korean Issues," *Radio Moscow*, December 29, 1993 in FBIS-SOV 93-249, December 30, 1993, p. 16.

sides, including the first Russian-South Korean summit, several key issues over which the former Soviet Union confronted had South Korea during the Cold War were not resolved fully as South Korea had expected. One of the best examples of this was Russia's handling of the 'empty' black box of the Korean Airlines (KAL) 007 shot down by a Soviet fighter in 1983.⁴³ Accordingly, a growing skepticism about Russia's attitudes was apparent among the attentive Korean public. Secondly, Russia seemed to be dissatisfied with its economic cooperation with South Korea.⁴⁴ Russian-South Korean trade continued to expand steadily, from US\$1.2 billion in 1992 to US\$1.57 billion in 1993 (Data of Korean Trade Center, 1992 and 1993), but problems over Russia's interest payment on this loan strained bilateral relations. More importantly, South Korea was less interested in improving relations with Russia than it had been with the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. This was reflected the two important factors: South Korea's New Diplomacy and Russia's loss of its influence in the international arena.

With the advent of President Kim Young-sam's Administration in early 1993, South Korea essentially shifted emphasis on strategic interests with Russia, despite its crucial importance as an actor for South Korea and Northeast Asia in the mid- to long-term.⁴⁵

⁴³ South Koreans were also bitterly disappointed with the conclusion of a Special State Committee in Russia that Russia could not be held responsible for the shooting down of the KAL 007. For the details analysis of KAL 007 problems, for example, see Alexander Dallin, *Blackbox: KAL 007 and the Superpowers*. Berkeley and Los Angeles (University of California Press, 1985). John Lepingwell, "New Soviet Revelations about KAL 007," *RFE/RL*, Vol. 3, No. 17, 1991.

⁴⁴ In the field of economic and trade relations, Russia strongly continued to emphasize its economic relations with South Korea. Especially, during the 1st Russian-South Korean summit in Seoul in November 1992, Yeltsin vigorously called for 'economic partnership' with South Korea. "Calls for Economic Partnership," *ITAR-TASS*, November 19, 1992 in FBIS-SOV 92-224, November 19, 1992, pp. 10-11.

⁴⁵ In May 1993, President Kim Young-Sam made a speech on the "Pacific Era and South Korea's New Diplomacy" at the Pacific Basin Economic Councils (PBEC) International General Meeting in Seoul, South Korea. In his speech, he laid down general direction for South Korea's new diplomacy including its new world and

This policy was implemented under the slogan of ‘Globalization’ (*Segyewha* in Korean), which reduced the relative emphasis on the Russian factor as the previous ‘Northern Policy’ was revised.⁴⁶

From a South Korean perspective, Russia no longer demonstrated the same degree of Soviet-era political influence over North Korea in reducing tensions on the Peninsula. For example, Russia had little influence on the North Korean nuclear issue, contrary to South Korean expectations, and in the post-Soviet era played no significant role in economic or security issues in Northeast Asia. As a result, South Korea increasingly focused on relations with China after the normalization of diplomatic relations. In August 1992, China became the second major power to recognize both Koreas on the Peninsula.

In Search of a Complementary Partnership? (Dec. 1993 – Dec. 1995)

The remarkable success of the former communists and ultra-nationalists in the December 1993 parliamentary elections forced Yeltsin’s pro-Western government towards a more nationalistic foreign policy. Under these circumstances, consensus on a more balanced Korean policy began to emerge. In other words, Russia

future outlooks, as well as a new approach to unification. There were five fundamentals for South Korea’s new diplomacy: (1) Globalizm; (2) Diversification; (3) Multi-Dimensionalizm; (4) Regional Cooperation; and (5) Future Orientation. Han Sung-joo, “Fundamentals of Korea’s New Diplomacy: New Korea’s Diplomacy Toward the World and the Future,” *Korea and World Affairs*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1993.

⁴⁶ South Korea first expressed interest in establishing relations with ‘Non-hostile’ communist states, including the Soviet Union, in January 1971 by the declaration of President Park Chung-hee. This became an important cornerstone for the northern policy of South Korea. For the comprehensive analysis of South Korea’s ‘Northern Policy,’ see Ahan Byung-joon, “South Korea’s New Nordpolitik,” *Korea and World Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 1988. Joo Seung-ho, “South Korea’s Nordpolitik and the Soviet Union (Russia),” *The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1993.

attempted to re-develop its Korean policy to accommodate its own new domestic political forces and institutions after the December 1993 parliamentary election.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, there were significant developments for treaty-based political and military cooperation between Russia and South Korea after the December 1993 parliamentary election.

Three important bilateral treaties were concluded during this period. Firstly, a Memorandum on Mutual Understanding between the Defense Ministries of Russia and South Korea and a Declaration on Military Cooperation between the two countries were signed when South Korean Defense Minister, Yi Yang-ho, visited Moscow in April 1994. In the words of Russian Defense Minister, Pavel Grachev, these documents reflected intentions to develop broader cooperation and determine the main events within the framework of ties between the two countries' military departments in 1994-95. At the meeting with the South Korean Defense Minister, Russian Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev stressed that "not only do we no longer look at each other along the barrel of a gun, we are ready to cooperate in setting up these relations for the joint security of friendly states and to have full-scale military cooperation."⁴⁸ In doing so, the Russians attempted to establish active military cooperation with South Korea whilst simultaneously proposing a new creation of a collective security system in the APR.

⁴⁷ According to Eugene and Natasha Bazhanov, "if ultra-nationalists should grab power, the picture could become one-sided again, this time in North Korea's favor. Ultra-nationalists would certainly drive into a worldwide confrontation within the US, with predictable consequences for Moscow's relations with South Korea and North Korea. The Korean Peninsula would again become a front of Cold War." Eugene and Natasha Bazhanov, "The Evolution of Russian-Korean Relations: External and Internal Factors," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 34, No. 9, 1994.

⁴⁸ "Grachev and ROK: Discuss Cooperation," *ITAR-TASS*, April 29, 1994 in FBIS-SOV 94-083, April 29, 1994, p. 7. "Kozyrev Calls for Military Cooperation with ROK," *ITAR-TASS*, April 29, 1994 in FBIS-SOV 94-083, April 29, 1994, p. 12.

Secondly, the two sides signed the Joint Russian-Korean Declaration and Protocol on Consultations Between Foreign Ministries at the 2nd Russian-South Korean summit, held in Moscow in June 1994. The high point of Russian-South Korean political relations during this period was South Korean President Kim Young-sam's visit to Moscow in June 1994. During the visit, Kim Young-sam and Yeltsin issued a joint declaration stating that relations between the two countries were developing into a "constructive mutually complementary partnership based on the common values of freedom, democracy, legality, respect for human rights, and a market economy."⁴⁹ The major results produced by Kim Young-sam's two sessions with President Yeltsin were published in a 13-point joint communiqué.⁵⁰ The two sides agreed at the summit to establish a joint committee to promote cooperation in trade, investment, and technological exchange. Trade ministers of the two countries exchanged Memoranda of Understanding on the establishment of the Korea-Russia Trade Committee during their talks in Moscow.⁵¹ The summit included a special focus on nuclear non-proliferation on the Korean Peninsula, as the North Korean nuclear program overshadowed the visit to Moscow. Importantly, Yeltsin informed his South Korean counterpart that his government was re-interpreting the 1961 Soviet-North Korean Treaty regarding its obligation to help North Korea in case of war.⁵²

⁴⁹ The South Korean President's visit to Moscow, the first between the two countries, took place in mid-December 1990. The Soviet media described this summit as "opening a new page in the history of bilateral relations between the Soviet Union and South Korea," *Izvestiya*, December 15, 1990, p. 7. For a detailed contents of declaration, see "Yeltsin, Kim Yong-sam Sign Partnership Declaration," *ITAR-TASS*, June 2, 1994 in FBIS-SOV 94-106, June 2, 1994, p. 5.

⁵⁰ Highlighting the results were Russia's agreement to take part in international sanctions against North Korea connected to the nuclear issue, Russia's assurance that its military alliance with North Korea was effectively invalid, and an agreement to establish a hot-line between Chong Wa Dae [The Korean Presidential Office] and the Kremlin, *Hankuk Ilbo*, June 3, 1994, pp. 1-2.

⁵¹ *Korea Newsreview*, Vol. 23, No. 23, June 4, 1994, p. 5.

⁵² During the talks, Yeltsin said that Article One of the 1961 Treaty between the Soviet Union and North Korea stipulating Moscow's military intervention can be regarded

Thirdly, a Memorandum on Mutual Understanding with Regard to Military Contacts Between the Defense Ministries of the Russian Federation and South Korea was signed when Russian Defense Minister, Pavel Grachev, visited South Korea in May 1995. The Memorandum of Understanding included the exchange of military experts and personnel, sharing military intelligence, and the South Korean purchase of Russian military equipment.⁵³ Based on this military agreement, there were frequent contacts in the military arena. For example, just after Grachev's visit to Seoul in May 1995, the South Korean Air Force Chief of Staff, Kim Hong-nae, arrived in Moscow. A source in the Russian Defense Ministry told the *Interfax* news agency that the Korean was primarily interested in MiG-29 fighters.⁵⁴

Faced with the North Korean nuclear issue, Russia continuously advocated creation of a multilateral Asian security conference, for which it needed support from other powers in APR (at least, in Northeast Asia). In this respect, by concluding political and military treaties with South Korea, Russia sought treaty-based support to implement its security policy in this region. Nonetheless, it was obvious that Russia was consistently more interested in expanding its economic relations with South Korea through these political and military agreements. Russia's primary motivation in founding good bilateral relations with South Korea was economic.⁵⁵

as defunct, said Chung Jong-uk, the chief foreign policy advisor to the South Korean President, *Korea Newsreview*, 1994.

⁵³ Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev in Seoul said that "Russia has raised the question of a regional security system in Northeast Asia and especially, a sub-regional system at the Seoul negotiations. In the words, of the Minister, the sub-regional system could involve Russia, China, Japan, North and South Korea, and the US." "Grachev Signs Military Memorandum," *ITAR-TASS*, May 19, 1995 in FBIS-SOV 95-097, May 19, 1995, p. 13.

⁵⁴ "ROK Air Force Chief of Staff Arrives on Visit: Interested in MiG-29," *Moscow Voice of Russia World Service*, May 22, 1995 in FBIS-SOV 95-100, May 24, 1995, p. 7.

⁵⁵ Due to Russia's economic interests to South Korea, it should be also noted that at the 2nd Russian-South Korean summit in Moscow in June 1994. President Kim

In this respect, Russian arms sales and debts to South Korea remained closely inter-related to the bilateral agreements. Russia was primarily interested in selling arms to South Korea and in converting its defense industry with South Korean assistance. In August 1994, for example, South Korea agreed to accept high-tech, arms such as jet fighters and rockets, from Russia in lieu of repayment of part of its US\$1.47 billion debt. A Russian military-industrial complex spokesman advised that the contract was potentially worth over US\$100 million.⁵⁶ Furthermore, when Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev visited South Korea in May 1995, the two sides appeared to agree on the provision of modern weaponry as payment in kind for the debt, including T-80U tanks, BMP-3 infantry combat vehicles, AT-7 anti-tank and SA-16 anti-aircraft missiles, ammunition, and spares.⁵⁷ A Russian military official reportedly stated in May 1995 that “this document (a Memorandum on Mutual Understanding with Regard to Military Contacts Between the Defense Ministries of the Russian Federation and South Korea) gives the go-ahead to the supplies [of] Russian military equipment to South Korea.”⁵⁸

In July 1995, Russian debts to South Korea were rescheduled in arrears. Under this arrangement, payments of US\$450.7 million in arrears (US\$391.8 million, the amount in arrears through 1993, plus US\$58.9 million in interest accrued through 1995) were repackaged into a new loan with principal (amortization) payment

Young-sam and Boris Yeltsin announced that Russia accepted South Korea’s request to stop supplying or selling Russian military equipment and weaponry to North Korea. At the summit in June 1994, South Korea also agreed to accept high-tech weapons such as jet fighters and missiles as partial payment for some US\$1.47 billion owed by Russia; the initial weapons deal was reported to be worth approximately US\$100 million. Lee Chongsik and Sohn Hyuk-sang, “South Korea in 1994: A Year of Trial,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 1995.

⁵⁶ *FBIS-SOV 94-151*.

⁵⁷ *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, May 13, 1995, p. 3.

⁵⁸ “Beijing, Seoul Welcome Grachev Proposal,” *Interfax*, May 22, 1995 in *FBIS-SOV 95-099*, May 22, 1995, p. 8.

for the period between 1995 and 1998. At the same time, some other contractual terms such as interest rates were also changed. In the meantime, South Korea was primarily interested in the political benefits of developing and concluding bilateral treaties with Russia. In particular, when the tension of the North Korean nuclear crisis was most acute in 1994, South Korea insisted that Russia stop supporting North Korea under the 1961 Soviet-North Korean Treaty and even abolish the 1961 Treaty altogether. South Korea clearly intended the political and military treaties with Russia to provide a legal basis for cessation of Russian assistance to North Korea, which was always more associated with political/security interests than economic interests.

Another reason for South Korean interest in expanded political and military cooperation with Russia was to diversify its political/military relations with other powers in Northeast Asia in the post-Soviet era. For example, in early 1996 South Korea aimed to conclude military logistics and procurement agreements with Canada, Russia, and Romania. A Defense Ministry official said that it was moving to establish agreements with as many countries as possible on a selective basis to diversify its sources of military hardware and software, heavily concentrated on the United States.⁵⁹ This meant South Korea attempted to prevent tilting further towards the US in the post-Soviet era.

During this period (Dec. 1991 - Dec. 1995), the security-military agenda of the bilateral relationship between Russia and South Korea was dominated by the North Korean nuclear crisis and the reinterpretation of the 1961 Soviet-North Korean Treaty. Consequently, the two sides focused their relations on the military related issues including the military Memorandum. Indeed, there were remarkable bilateral developments in the political and military agreements between the two sides, despite fundamentally

⁵⁹ *The Korea Times*, February 4, 1996, p. 3.

different interests.

Nevertheless, there were obvious limits to the development of further bilateral relations, in terms of both political and military cooperation. Above all, the US factor for the Russian-South Korean relations influenced their bilateral relations, especially in political/military issues. For example, the US factor inevitably affected Russian arms sale to South Korea. The South Korean Defense Ministry discussed the possibility of using Russian armaments only for training and experimental programs, as South Korea had long focused on US armaments, which were incompatible with the Russian systems.⁶⁰ More importantly, however, the South Korean side could not agree any further military relations with Russia without US consent. For example, as *Krasnaya Zvezda* noted, the talks on weapon sales were abruptly suspended following US pressure. The US government was concerned that the MiG-29s and S-300 tactical missile interceptors could successfully compete against US F-16Ms and Patriot missile systems.⁶¹ Secondly, there were still different approaches to the issue of arms sales and debt. In August 1994, the South Korean government almost agreed to Moscow's proposals to repay some part of debt on credits, given earlier to the Soviet Union, in the form of deliveries of Russian armaments. According to *Yonhap* News Agency, however, agreement was never reached on the delivery of armaments valued at almost half of the Russian debt: US\$650 million.⁶² South Korea hoped to base these relations on licensing, supplies of spares, and production

⁶⁰ According to a high-ranking South Korean military official, "it was difficult to include Russian military hardware in the arsenal of the South Korean Armed Forces, because the latter were organized and equipped according to the American system." "South Korea may use Russian Weapons for Training," *ITAR-TASS*, January 27, 1994 in FBIS-SOV 94-019, January 28, 1994, p. 9.

⁶¹ *Krasnaya Zvezda*, September 18, 1993.

⁶² "ROK Partly Agrees To Repay Debt with Arms," *ITAR-TASS*, August 5, 1994 in FBIS-SOV 94-152, August 8, 1994, p. 16.

of Russian-designed material at South Korean plants. Russia did not reject this form of cooperation, but preferred large-scale military-technical relations and the delivery of materiel made in Russia.⁶³ Thirdly, for South Korea, the political value of Russia had been diminished rapidly due to its internal instability and weakened international position, especially in its ability to influence the North Korean nuclear issue as South Korea had expected. Meanwhile, Russian policy direction was deeply affected by the South Korean rejection of its proposed international security conference. Russia was unable to demonstrate any capacity to influence North Korea, failing to persuade it to rejoin the Nuclear non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or to agree the abolition [or reinterpretation] of the 1961 Soviet-North Korean Treaty. There were both essential prerequisites for military cooperation between Russia and South Korea. This prevented South Korea from cooperating more actively with Russia, demonstrating that in the post-Soviet era the theory of military [political] cooperation in Northeast Asia between Russia and South Korea was different from the reality.

Russian-South Korean relations during this period included frequent contacts in most fields, although neither country was satisfied with the outcomes. For example, the first session of the joint intergovernmental Russian-South Korean Economic, Scientific, and Technical Commission, scheduled to open in Seoul in May 1994, was postponed at the very last moment.⁶⁴ Russian Vice Premier Shokhin planned to visit Seoul to discuss the whole range of trade and economic relations prior to the South Korean President's visit to Russia, but this too was postponed. This all occurred during the most acute phase of North Korean nuclear

⁶³ "Quoted on Regional Security System," *ITAR-TASS*, May 20, 1995 in FBIS-SOV 95-098, May 22, 1995, p. 14.

⁶⁴ *Izvestiya*, May 24, 1994, p. 4. "ROK-Russian Economic Commission Session Postponed," *ITAR-TASS*, May 19, 1994 in FBIS-SOV 94-098, May 20, 1994, p. 8.

crisis and at the rejection of Russia's proposal for the international security conference.

The biggest problem for economic relations between the two sides remained Russia's inability to repay loans made by South Korea to both the former Soviet Union and to Russia. Due to this, Russia gained fewer economic benefits than it had hoped. For example, at the end of 1995, the overall amount of South Korean investment was a mere US\$49.3 million across 59 projects, most of which related to the trade and services sector.⁶⁵

The steady expansion of trade and economic cooperation was not accompanied by a commensurate growth in direct investment in Russia. Only thirty Russian-South Korean joint ventures had been established by early 1995. Overall, South Korean investment in Russia was still very modest, at only US\$50 million.⁶⁶

A Shaky Partnership? (Dec. 1995 - Jul. 1996)

Unlike previous years, no significant political and military bilateral treaties were concluded between Russia and South Korea during this period. Only two minor bilateral treaties were signed. Firstly, in February 1996, Russia and South Korea concluded a protocol to promote further economic cooperation, strengthen business contacts, and boost mutual trust between the two business communities. Under the accord, the two sides would provide active channels for a wide range of fora in bilateral cooperation, information exchange, and materials pertaining to economic development policies.⁶⁷ Secondly, in March 1996,

⁶⁵ V. Moiseev, "Russia and the Korean Peninsula," *International Affairs (Moscow)*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 1996, p. 108.

⁶⁶ Valery Denissov, "Russia in the APR: Problems of Security and Cooperation," *International Affairs (Moscow)*, No. 4-5, 1995.

⁶⁷ *The Korea Times*, February 27, 1996, p. 8.

Russia and South Korea signed a Memorandum of Understanding to crack down on illegal trafficking of narcotics and psychotropic substances between the two countries.⁶⁸ In June 1996, Russia and South Korea discussed a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty involving such criminal matters as drug and arms trafficking.⁶⁹

Above all, after the 1995 December parliamentary election, the Russian leadership tried vigorously to improve bilateral relations with North Korea.⁷⁰ The forthcoming Russian presidential election demanded the Russian leadership demonstrate good relations with previous allies such as North Korea to keep its major power status in Northeast Asia. In other words, to win the presidential election each Russian candidate had to emphasize good relations with countries that had previously recognized the Soviet Union's superpower status during the Soviet era.

Another significant limit on the political and military relations during this period was the US and South Korean-led "Four-Way Talks,"⁷¹ which created a new channel for discussing peace with North Korea, but excluded Russia (and Japan).⁷² This once again

⁶⁸ *The Korea Times*, March 22, 1996, p. 9.

⁶⁹ "ROK, Russia Initial Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty," *Yonhap*, June 14, 1996 in FBIS-EAS 96-118, June 14, 1996.

⁷⁰ To a large extent, the 1995 December parliamentary election confirmed the continuing strength of the conservative-nationalists who have constantly rebuked the Yeltsin Administration for its emasculated foreign policy. Regarding the Korean Peninsula, pro-North Korean forces came to the fore after the December 1995 parliamentary election. Indeed, across a broad spectrum of society, a feeling emerged that improved relations with North Korea would enhance Russia's undermined position on the Peninsula. As Valentin Moiseev, the Deputy Director of the 1st Asian Department of the Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said that the trend of a constructive restoration of bilateral ties with the former Soviet Union's allies was more actively bolstered after the 1995 December parliamentary election, together with the appointment of Primakov as a Russian Foreign Minister in early 1996. Valentin Moiseev, "On the Korean Settlement," *International Affairs (Moscow)*, Vol. 43, No. 3, 1997.

⁷¹ Kim Young Sam and Bill Clinton put forward a four-party (Two Koreas, China and the US) peace proposal on April 16, 1996.

demonstrated the limitations of Russian-South Korean cooperation, in both the political and military arenas, while the US and South Korea reinforced their military alliance based on the 1953 US-South Korean Treaty.⁷³

Relations between Russia and South Korea entered an endurance test during this period. South Korea displayed dissatisfaction with Russia's policy of expanding and raising the level of political, economic, and cultural ties between Russia and North Korea. Furthermore, bilateral relations were seriously undermined by Russia's exclusion from the "Four-Way Talks."⁷⁴ During this period, Russian-South Korean relations proved to be a shaky partnership.

⁷² In mid-April 1996, North Korea sent armed troops into the Joint Security Area (JSA) of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in violation of the Armistice Treaty that has maintained peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula for the past four decades. To maximize the effects of the provocation, the North violated the DMZ just days before the parliamentary elections in the South.

⁷³ During an interview with *The Seoul Shinmun*, South Korean Defense Minister Yi Yang-ho stated, "our military has established a firm defense posture by maintaining a perfect posture for an all-out war and by developing the ROK-U.S. combined defense posture." He continued that "following the end of the Cold War, international relations have become more complicated. The situation in neighboring countries is changeable, and conflicts have become diverse, amplifying uncertainty. Based on the ROK-U.S. alliance, we will diversify military diplomacy and increase cooperation with neighboring countries, including Japan, the PRC, and Russia in order to guarantee national interests," *The Seoul Shinmun*, February 12, 1996, p. 5.

⁷⁴ As regards the "Four-Way Talks," Yevgeniy Primakov stated that "relations between Moscow and Seoul are 'growing pains'." "Primakov Comments on Talks with South Korean Counterpart," *ITAR-TASS*, May 7, 1996 in FBIS-SOV 96-090, May 7, 1996. At the inauguration evening of the Korea-Russia Culture Council in March 1996, Russian Ambassador to Seoul, George Kunadze, also stated that "it is important for Koreans to know that Russia is one of the greatest countries in the world... Problems are temporary: Russia is forever." "MNU Minister, Russian Envoy Inaugurate Culture Council," *Yonhap*, March 25, 1996 in FBIS-EAS 96-058, March 25, 1996.

Conclusion

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian foreign policy transformed during Yeltsin's first presidential term (Dec. 1991 - Jul. 1996). Russia, as a successor state to the former Soviet Union, undertook the same fundamental re-evaluation of its policies towards the Korean Peninsula in accordance with a newly emerging post-Soviet system and with rapid domestic changes as it did for relations with other countries during this transitional period.

Faced with entirely new domestic and international circumstances, Russia's relations with South Korea became one of its foreign policy priorities in the Asia-Pacific region. Following an initial period of realignment, however, Russia gradually pursued a more balanced Korean policy.

During this period (1991-96), Russia made an active effort towards South Korea on the Peninsula, concluding several important political and military treaties that would provide a new legal foundation for their post-Soviet relations. Nevertheless, Russia generally failed to accomplish its goals in relation to South Korea. This demonstrated an incapability to conduct an effective foreign policy on the Korean Peninsula, at least during Yeltsin's first presidential term. The top Russian leadership continued to hold contradictory and inconsistent views on the Russian-South Korean Basic Treaty. Given the uncertainties and unpredictability on the domestic scene in Russia, however, the lack of consensus may not be surprising. Moreover, as regards the Russian-South Korean military treaties, the post-Soviet international system had been favorable for neither side. Although the Cold War was over, Russian-Korean relations were still governed by the basic structure of the past. Despite this, Russia was no longer allied to North Korea and was now concluding the political and military treaties with South Korea, despite the ROK's Cold War-era

relationship with the US. In Northeast Asia, this was an unprecedented example of building a new relationship in the post-Soviet era, forgoing the previous ideological basis of the past 50 years.

In sum, Russia attempted to establish new bilateral relations with South Korea based on treaties during Yeltsin's first presidential term, but its policy was reactive for both internal and external reasons. Thus, this period (1991-96) became a test-bed: an estimation of how much further bilateral relations could develop after the conclusion of the Russian-South Korea Basic Treaty. The development of Russian-South Korean bilateral treaties were a central aspect of Russia's South Korean policy and its subsequent bilateral relations during Yeltsin's first presidential term.