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Neither Peace, Nor War in Korea: A Russian Assessment of Past, Present and Future

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Abstract

The lessons of history show that the situation in Korea remains a security threat for Russia. Although the nuclear/missile programs of North Korea (seen in Russia as a response by Pyongyang to the threats its the very regime's existence) are causing concern in Russia, they cannot be solved separately without addressing the broader security regime issues in Korea. The multilateral diplomatic process, when and if it is resumed in the aftermath of the tragic "Cheonan" incident, should have on its agenda not only denuclearization, but also security guarantees for the DPRK, as well as a regional security regime as a mechanism to manage these guarantees. The US is to play a pivotal role in such a change of approaches as well as in engaging Pyongyang. The North Korean regime shows no signs of imminent collapse and should be dealt with as a long-term actor in Korea. As pressure and sanctions do not help obtain the goals of denuclearization, peace, stability and development, an engagement policy with the North to bring about transformation and modernization of the regime is the only answer. Much will depend on South Korea's ability to recognize this reality and act accordingly, which could bring its partnership with Russia to a truly strategic level.

Key Words: Russia policy in Korea, six-party talks, nuclear problem, North Korea, Russia-ROK strategic partnership

* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Russian Government.

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The Lessons of History

2010 is a year of anniversaries. A full century has passed since Korea lost its independence, 65 years since it was liberated, and 50 years since the Korean War started. The unfortunate legacy of these events still remains. The last century was not a Golden Age for Korea, and no stable peace has been achieved to this day.

Russia was involved in many of these historic events. For Russia, over most of the last 130 years (since start of official relations in 1884) Korea has been a "trouble spot." In the early years, the Russia Empire entered into a competition with other colonial powers for domination over Korea, and lost. The Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905, one of the reasons for which was the struggle over control of Korea, was disastrous not only for external security, but for the very fate of Imperial Russia: the inability of the Tsarist state to properly manage the war effort and the subsequent defeat of Russian troops led to widespread popular dissent, which resulted in the first Russian Revolution of 1905, and it in turn paved the way for the Bolshevik takeover in 1917. Korea, in the meantime, was lost to Russia for the first half of the 20th century, becoming a Japanese colony.

65 years ago, during the last month of the Second World War, Soviet troops played a decisive role in liberating Korea; the Soviet 25th Army on the 8th of August 1945 attacked the Japanese forces in Korea. Russian casualties during this operation exceeded 5,000. The 15th of August became liberation day for Korea (US troops landed in Korea on September 8, 1945, and took no part in combat in Korea).[1]

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[1]-A. Torkunov, V. Denisiov, Vl. Lee, *The Korean Peninsula: Essays of the Post Second World*

However, no peace came to Korea then, as the country was partitioned in accordance with the Yalta agreements between the USSR, the US and Great Britain. North and South Korean rulers started preparations for unification of the country - both on their own terms. The superpowers, in the spirit of the unfolding Cold War, supported their clients.

60 years ago the bloody war started in Korea — in essence, a civil war, but one which quickly internationalized and involved not only superpowers, but many indirect and informal international actors. The popular opinion in South Korea is that it was the USSR and Stalin who initiated the bloodshed. In fact, however, as many historic documents made available after the collapse of the USSR show, Stalin was very much reluctant to agree to North Korean requests to initiate the fight for unification - for example, on September 24, 1949, the Soviet Communist Party Politburo adopted a special resolution rejecting the appeal by Pyongyang to initiate combat operations against the South.[2] However Kim Il Sung was difficult to dissuade. As one Soviet expert bluntly stated, "You'd make a mistake to think that [DPRK founder] Kim Il Sung was a Moscow man."[3] In early 1950, after the Communist victory in China, and when Soviet security increased in the wake of the first A-bomb test, Stalin, pressured by Kim Il Sung, reluctantly agreed to this adventure, although on the condition that no Soviet troops (apart from air pilots) took part in the conflict and China had to manage the affair.[4] That was a mistake, nearly leading to a global disaster - support of "national liberation" only

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War History (Moscow: OLMA publishers, 2008). pp. 49-51.

[2] - A. Torkunov, *The Mysterious War: Korean Conflict of 1950-1953* (Moscow: Rosspen Publishers, 2000), p. 46.

[3] - Don Oberdofer, *The Two Koreas. A Contemporary History* (London: Warner, 1998), p. 154.

[4] - Ibid., pp. 55-58, 59, 147.

resulted in US interference, and the world found itself on the brink of the Third World War. After that Stalin's dreams of "world socialist revolution," if he harbored any, were shattered forever.[5]

Moscow understood the impossibility of a victory by either side in the Korean conflict sooner than others and initiated a diplomatic process with the US to find a compromise to stop the war (as early as May-June 1951, G. Kennan started discussing this issue with Soviet-UN Representative Ya Malik). However, South Korea wanted revenge and victory. Although China insisted on direct Soviet participation in the talks, Stalin abstained, saying that the agreement would have to be signed by the North Korean/Chinese side and the UN Command. In fact, however, only after Stalin's death was Moscow's overly ideological approach to the Korean War changed.[6] The war ended in a truce. There were no winners - no actor had achieved its goals. Six decades afterward, we are still on the same page.

The war made reconciliation almost impossible, and the confrontation between North and South Korea has become a part of the global superpowers' tug of war. The USSR had to make new sacrifices (dictated by ideology) to rebuild the DPRK from the ashes. The Soviets constructed more than 70 infrastructural and industrial facilities, which became the backbone of North Korean energy production, metallurgy, chemicals production, construction materials production, machine-building, etc. However, the USSR became a hostage of the North-South confrontation

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[5] - For a detailed account see *Koreiskaya Narodno-Democraticheskaya Respublika* [Democratic People's Republic of Korea], M. Trigubenko, et. al. (eds.) (Moscow: Nauka publishers, 1985), pp. 68-75.

[6] - A. Torkunov, V. Denisiov, Vl. Lee, op.cit., pp. 159-165, 177-178.

- Moscow could have no relations with South Korea for several decades and was urged by North Korea to regard it as the "enemy." Nevertheless Russian experts watched attentively the spectacular economic development of the ROK. Russian experts since the mid-70s had suggested improving relations with Seoul, arguing not only the economic benefits but also the possibility of easing confrontation between the two blocks and ushering in détente in the Far East in addition to Europe.[7] But Pyongyang was hellbent against it. As early as 1970, forty years ago, Moscow began considering its options in Korea, including maintaining limited contacts with Seoul, and since 1973 it permitted informal ties.[8] However the real change came only with "perestroika" in the USSR. 20 years ago, the USSR (and later China) recognized South Korea, ushering in a new era of reconciliation which many hoped would be followed by the cross-recognition of North Korea by the United States and Japan. There was a real chance to build a new security system in Korea, based on mutual recognition and peaceful coexistence. However South Korea and the West did not accept that option. They expected the downfall of the DPRK along the lines of the collapse of the Communist governments of Eastern Europe. That never happened, and a new confrontation cycle began on Korean peninsula; this time the stakes were raised by Pyongyang's aspirations for a nuclear capability to withstand Western pressure after its loss of Soviet support.

Ten years ago, there appeared a glimmer of hope that Koreans in the

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7 - See p.e. Faina Shabshina, Is It Possible to Unite the Korean Knot? *Izvestia*, November 9, 1989.

8 - Vadim Tkachenko, *The Korean Peninsula and Interests of Russia* (Moscow: "Vostochnaya literatura" Publishers, 2000), pp. 56-57.

North and the South would finally take their fate in their hands as the first-ever North-South summit was held in June 2000 (symbolically followed, incidentally, by the first-ever visit of a Russian head of state - President Putin - to Pyongyang in July). In the first decade of the 21st century, hopes for Korean national reconciliation persisted despite the nuclear crisis.

However now, in 2010, we have nearly returned to the same square one where we have been languishing for decades - neither peace, nor war in Korea. The situation has been further aggravated by the sinking of the South Korean vessel "Cheonan," which Seoul blamed on North Korea, appealing to the UN Security Council for a response (Pyongyang rejected the claim but increased its hostility toward the South). For Russia, which has always been friendly toward the Korean nation (as the only border country with which Korea has no historical record of military conflict), the Korean peninsula is a source of constant worry. This situation in which the Korean War has achieved no de jure or de facto end (North Koreans have unilaterally said they do not even recognize the truce of 1953[9]) is abnormal, as Russian experts point out.[10]

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9 - "Any hostile act by the UNSC immediately means the abrogation of the Armistice Agreement" stated the Foreign Ministry of the DPRK on May 29, 2009 that "DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman Clarifies its Stand on UNSC's Increasing Threat," *KCNA*, http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-e.htm.

10 - M. Krupyanko, L. Areshidze, *USA and East Asia-The Struggle for a "New Order"* (Moscow: International Relations Publishers, 2010), p. 289.

Origins of the Nuclear Problem and Vain Efforts to Solve It Separately from Security Issues

Which came first - the chicken or the egg? In the case of North Korea the answer is clear. If we look back to the origins of North Korea's initial push to acquire nuclear weapons (actually dating back to the 1950s),[11] it is clear that for the Pyongyang elite this was a survival issue. "Bombed back to the Stone Age" during the Korean War, the North Korean leaders of the time (many of whom are still at the helm) were extremely concerned with security and considered the policies of the United States, supported by former colonial power Japan and South Korea, to be a menace to its very existence. Pyongyang pushed to acquire its own deterrent not least because North Korea did not have any moral obligations to abstain – North Koreans were aware of U.S. plans to use nuclear weapons against them during the Korean War and even after the war (up to the 1970s at least), and they still suspect the U.S. military of having plans to use next-generation miniature nuclear munitions against vital targets in North Korea.[12]

It should be clearly understood that North Korea's nuclearization is a product of its insecurity, and the latter should be addressed in solving the former. If this had been done at the beginning of the 1990s, the "nuclear problem" as we know it now might have not developed at all (remember that under the 1994 Agreed Framework with the US, North Korea had actually frozen its nuclear activities for at least 4 or 5 years).

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[11] - A. Likholetov, "How it Happened," *Korus Forum, No. 24*, http://www.korusforum.org/PHP/STV.php?stid=106.

[12] - Gavan McCormack, *Target North Korea* (Sydney/New York: Random House, 2004), p. 150.

However at that time the underlying secret desire of the West was to change the regime, not to cooperate with it. The "strategic decision" on co- existence with North Korea has still not been adopted by the major capitals. So how can one expect results from the diplomatic process, if one's side goal (denuclearization) is not supported by a genuine readiness to react to the other party demand (guarantees of security and non-interference)?

In analyzing the results of the diplomatic process of 2003-2008 and the reasons for its failure, it is useful to consider the objectives of Pyongyang. North Korea entered the talks with the underlying motives of reducing the international pressure on them due to their nuclear program and exploring their options - what might the opposite side suggest in return for the elimination of their nuclear capability (once a possibility, now a reality). However, the formula agreed to on September 19, 2005 - the substance of which was 'peace for nukes'[13] - was not, as North Korean leaders perceived it, implemented by their adversaries. The right-wing neocon faction in the Bush administration immediately torpedoed the above-mentioned Joint Statement by initiating a freeze of North Korean accounts during the BDA affair. After that, any illusions in Pyongyang, if they had ever existed, were lost. Kim Jong-il stated: "The confrontation with the aggressive forces of imperialism is in essence based on force; only force can win over imperialists."[14] After the first nuclear test in October 2006, North Koreans chose to rely on power politics and force over diplomacy.

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[13] - The key elements of this deal were from North Korean side "...to abandon all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and return at an early date to the NPT and to IAEA safeguards," and from US side "to respect each other's [US and DPRK] sovereignty, exist peacefully together and take steps to normalize their relations subject to their respective bilateral policies."

[14] - Kim Jong-il, *DPRK is an Invincible Juche Socialist State* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 2008), p. 20 (In Russian).

Regardless of the rhetoric (or elusive statements about "denuclearization of the whole of the Korean peninsula"[15]) Kim Jong-il actually opted to maintain nuclear weapons at all costs. What was on the table at the six-party talks in 2006-2008 was the North Korean nuclear *program* (the facilities and projects that had already played their role), not nuclear *weapons and fissile materials.*[16] However even this initial phase could not be completed. Pyongyang not only shut down the Yongbyong nuclear facility, but started actually dismantling it. But North Korea's gains were negligible. Even the small step of the US "de-listing" the DPRK as a terrorist state was carried out in an awkward manner and belatedly – and can be easily reversed, as discussions on Capitol Hill after the "Cheonan" incident show. The economic aid package (in fact fairly limited even in comparison with that of the 1994 Agreed Framework) was also not implemented fully due to the Japanese and South Korean positions. At the same time, further down the road in "phase three" Pyongyang would have to discuss - and probably be pressed for concessions on - something more tangible, like the reprocessed fissile materials and actual nuclear weapons.

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15 – "The denuclearization of the peninsula is the goal of the policy consistently pursued by the Government of the Republic of Korea with a view to contributing to peace and security in Northeast Asia and the denuclearization of the world." Foreign Ministry statement on January 11, 2010; "DPRK Proposes to Start of Peace Talks," *KCNA*, January 11, 2010, http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-e.htm.

16 – Pyongyang persistently points out that "The DPRK's dismantlement of nuclear weapons is unthinkable even in a dream as long as there exist the sources that compelled it to have access to nukes," KCNA Statement, September 30, 2009; "As long as the U.S. nuclear threat persists, the DPRK will increase and update various type nuclear weapons as its deterrent in such a manner as it deems necessary in the days ahead," "Foreign Ministry Dismisses US Nuclear Plan," KCNA, April 9, 2010; "The DPRK's dismantlement of its nuclear weapons can never happen even if the earth is broken to pieces unless the hostile policy toward the DPRK is rolled back and the nuclear threat to it removed," "KCNA Snubs Call for DPRK's Dismantlement of Nukes," *KCNA*, February 19, 2009, http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-e.htm.

On the other side, the DPRK felt that its concessions were not fully recognized and valued. "Hawks" in Pyongyang might have suspected these concessions were perceived in the West as a sign of weakness and a testimony to Pyongyang's pressing need to normalize relations. The shift by the Lee Myung-bak administration since early 2008 to a hard-line policy, effectively dismantling almost all of the achievements of the North-South rapprochement under the "liberal" governments of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, was seen as yet more evidence of the untrustworthiness of the negotiation partners and became a major setback for those in Pyongyang's leadership who put diplomacy in front of the *songun* (military first) policy.[17] By 2008, the six-party talks seemed to Pyongyang to have exhausted their potential to help solve the central issue – that of regime survival. Pyongyang also took the opportunity to become a member of the global nuclear club without any particular danger of retaliation from the world community (since the US was busy with the power transitions in Iraq and Afghanistan).

Where do we stand in mid 2010? Pyongyang, especially after the campaign of pressure on it in the wake of "Cheonan" incident, would find it ridiculous even to speak about giving up its "nuclear deterrence." Reacting to the publication of the US Nuclear Posture Review, Pyongyang in mid April 2010 officially confirmed its own position on nuclear weapons:

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[17] – The JoongAng Ilbo wrote a day before "Cheonan" tragedy, involuntarily summarizing Seoul's policy for the previous period: "The Lee Myung-bak administration's so-called diplomacy of practicality has no tolerance for North Korea. Inter-Korean exchanges have been deadlocked since the shooting of a South Korean tourist at Mount Kumgang in July 2008. The number of people traveling between the countries plunged by 35 percent last year from 2008. Humanitarian aid came in at 63.7 billion won, half the amount in 2008. Discussions on developing North Korean resources have not even come up," *JoongAng Ilbo*, March 25, 2010.

"As long as the U.S. nuclear threat persists, the DPRK will increase and update various types of nuclear weapons as its deterrent in such a manner as it deems necessary in the days ahead." Later the Foreign Ministry said the DPRK "will manufacture nukes as much as it deems necessary but will neither participate in nuclear arms race nor produce them more than it feels necessary. It will join the international nuclear disarmament efforts with an equal stand with other nuclear weapons states,"[18] thus trying to promote itself as a nuclear power. So it would be naïve to expect voluntary denuclearization by North Korea in the near future.

What exactly denuclearization means is also yet to be determined. A country cannot be completely deprived of the right to conduct nuclear research and make peaceful use of nuclear energy – among other things, that would contradict the NPT's principles, which we urge North Korea to follow. Narrowly put, denuclearization could be defined as the disposal of the actual weapons, existing fissile materials and their production facilities. But even in such a case, human and scientific capital and expertise in nuclear technology in North Korea would not disappear overnight, which leaves open the possible restart of such programs. The closed character of the country would prevent verification on a scale which would be satisfactory to the world community. A viable conclusion that the country has truly "denuclearized" even on such a limited scale cannot be reached under the current political regime. Even if a segment of the elite were ready to trade off their nuclear potential for their personal future (which actually happened in South Africa), this cannot be verified without a regime change. As of now, denuclearizing North Korea without

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18 – "Foreign Ministry Issues Memorandum on N-Issue," *KCNA*, April 21, 2010, http://www. kcna.co.jp/index-e.htm.

setting in place a solid system of collective security could actually increase the military risks in the region.

What are the implications of these developments for Russia and its Korean policies? Now that North Korea has carried out two tests, which makes it necessary to accept it as a de facto nuclear state, what should Russia's priorities be? We should point out that the actual use of the DPRK's nuclear weapons (even if they prove to be operational) seems highly improbable. The exception to this would be in the case of all-out war, which is actually deterred by the presence of nuclear weapons in North Korea. The possible dangers mainly involve an accident or turmoil in North Korea which could cause control of its nuclear materials to loosen.

What could really affect Russia's interests is a further expansion of North Korea's nuclear programs and improvement of its nuclear weapons and delivery means (missile programs). That could have consequences eventually endangering Russia's national security, including an increased regional response to these developments, which would require counter-measures. The possibility of North Korea's WMD technologies falling into terrorists' hands should also not be totally discarded. Russia's interest in stopping these further developments coincides with the interests of the US, Japan, and South Korea.

A Security Regime Should Come First

What could be the blueprint for a solution? There are a multitude of suggestions and road-maps. First I will try to define the obvious goals of Russian policy in Korea, explaining its priorities in this area as I see them:

- Moscow needs stability and regional development in order to create conditions for Russia's own deeper integration into the regional and international division of labor and globalization. This is important for the economic prosperity of the Russian Far East and for security in preventing it from "distancing" itself from the federal center. Therefore the prevention of conflicts and increased tensions in Korea is a must.

- Russia wishes the Korean peninsula to be free of all weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and is strongly against proliferation in this area, as it could trigger a nuclear arms race in the region and change the balance of power globally. The further development of WMDs by the DPRK should be stopped.

- Russia would not formally recognize the DPRK as a nuclear state.

- The DPRK should obey the NPT rules and return to the IAEA, and it should allow verification and guarantees of denuclearization based on international law. At the same time, as all countries have the right to develop modern energy technologies, including nuclear energy, Russia would support the development of a peaceful nuclear program in the DPRK, including the possible construction of light-water reactors.[19]

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[19] – "Russia has always stated that DPRK as a sovereign state may develop its peaceful nuclear program in accordance with the norms of international law. If the DPRK would return to NPT and join the additional protocol on guarantees with IAEA she can expect cooperation and support from this organization and other states." Statement by Russian Vice Foreign Minister Alexander Alexeev, *RIA Novosti*, August 17, 2005. Clearly, North Korea considers LWRs more than just a source of much-needed electricity generating capacity. Rather, the demand appears to be part of a long-term strategy aimed at assuring regime survival by engaging Washington and trying to draw it into a more positive relationship. Shortly after the 2005 Joint Statement, when the Bush administration was insisting on completing the shutdown of the LWR project, Peter Hayes and his colleagues at the Nautilus Institute suggested that the solution might be to provide

- Moscow is certain that the final solution to the Korean issue can only be found within a multiparty diplomatic process, and the idea of a "package solution" proposed in agreements reached by the six-party talks in 2005-2007, strikingly similar to an idea first suggested by Moscow in 2003,[20] should be the basis for it. This idea is not so distant from the later "Grand Bargain" proposal, but synchronization is the main problem.

- Security for the DPRK is actually a precondition for achieving the goals of non-proliferation, demilitarization and stability, although Russia does admit it might take some time. The achievement of these goals does not depend solely on the DPRK's actions but is the responsibility of other countries as well.

- To achieve these goals, it is essential for Russia to maintain both good relations with the DPRK and cooperation with other major players. Russia does not see the international process, comprised of the major powers involved, as a "zero-sum game." The idea of a regional Cold War-like division on Korean affairs (3+3) has no appeal for Moscow. Russia would rather see "a concert of powers." This could be formed on the basis of the multi-party mechanism of nuclear talks, which has already proved its usefulness.

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modern Russian LWR technology with South Korean and Japanese firms doing much of the work, http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/09063Goldstein.pdf. As the chief of the Russian nuclear energy agency stated in November 2005, Russia did not set its participation in LWR construction on the condition that the DPRK must return to the NPT - it could perhaps do so as part of a multinational consortium.

20 – Press Statement of Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesman, N46, December 1, 2003.

- Russia supports North-South reconciliation and cooperation without outside interference aimed at the ultimate goal of Korean reunification in a form agreed upon by both North and South Korea. Moscow disapproves of any actions by either side that would endanger peace between the two Koreas. Russia stands for the creation of a unified, peaceful, and prosperous Korea that is friendly to Russia. Such a country would be one of Russia's most important partners in Asia, helping to build a more balanced system of international relations in the Far East, dominated now by the US-Japan-China triangle. At the same time, Korea could become a growing market, especially for the resources of the Russian Far East.

- A Korea dependent on a foreign country, be it the US or China, would be detrimental to Russian interests, and Russia would strive to prevent such a development. "Absorption" of the North by a pro-American South Korea could be harmful both to the Korean nation and to regional security, and Russia would probably join China in opposing such a scenario. Nor is a China-dominated North Korea desirable, as such a regime would probably be unstable, and such a development would lead to "containment" efforts aimed at China and increasing military tensions in the area.

- A new security system in and around the Korean peninsula should take into account the legitimate interests of all the parties and should not be used for purposes other than maintaining peace and stability and achieving development.

Such an approach is well suited to the core Russian strategy based on its national interests and also is in tune with the policies of its "strategic partner," China.

It should be admitted, however, that by 2009 the provocative behavior of Pyongyang (and above all its pursuit of nuclear and missile capabilities) had tested the Kremlin's patience nearly to its limits, and gave rise to a less lenient approach toward the DPRK's adventurism in the top echelons of power, including the Kremlin. Global interests, including preserving the non-proliferation regime, are considered more important for Russia than appeasing the DPRK.[21] The "reset" of relations with the US, high on Moscow's agenda, might have prompted it to put less weight on good relations with Pyongyang for the sake of closer cooperation with Washington in vital security areas, especially in strategic arms limitation and counter-proliferation efforts. Such an approach also presupposes that effective measures against the potential threat might be necessary, including increased military preparedness in the Russian Far East, as well as a more supportive approach to sanctions against North Korea.

Moscow officials therefore in 2008-2009 were increasingly critical of the DPRK's rhetoric and actions, including its rocket launch.[22] The

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[21] - It should be noted that the Medvedev administration's view, that North Korean nuclear ambitions are a global challenge and should be dealt with sternly, is closer to the approach of the US administration than was the case previously. See Joint Press Conference of Russian President D. Medvedev and US President B. Obama, http://www.ln.mid.ru/Brp_4.nsf/arh/58DC80824084D8FDC32575EC002720BD?OpenDocument.

[22] - Moscow expressed its "concern with the escalation of tensions" before the missile test in April 2009 and "repeatedly recommended to the DPRK not to conduct the rocket experiment." Russia supported the UN Security Council Presidential Statement on North Korea's rocket launch, adopted on the 13th of April, that criticized the launch. However that maneuver backfired. As Russia had previously pointed out the right of the nations to conduct satellite experimental tests, this inconsistency surprised Pyongyang and evoked

nuclear test of May 25, 2009 caused indignation in the Kremlin, which called it "irresponsible," "absolutely unacceptable" and "unpardonable." President Medvedev himself did not spare harsh words, noting the "personal responsibility" of the "perpetrators of this action."[23] Russia also denounced the North Korean intention to proceed to uranium enrichment. On March 30, 2010 President Medvedev signed a decree implementing intensified United Nations Security Council sanctions against Pyongyang's nuclear programs. The presidential decree banned the purchase of weapons and relevant materials from the DPRK by government offices, enterprises, banks, organizations and individuals currently under Russia's jurisdiction. It also prohibited the transport of weapons and relevant materials through Russian territory for export to the DPRK. Any financial aid or educational training that might facilitate

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its displeasure. This was bluntly expressed to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov during his April 2009 visit to Pyongyang, which might be the last high-level contact between the two capitals for some time to come. Lavrov was not granted a meeting with Kim Jong-il, and the North Koreans made clear that they will not accept the Russian position on the need to abstain from further tests and return to the negotiation process. MFA Spokesman's Commentary of March 10, 2009, http://www.ln.mid.ru/Brp_4.nsf/arh/75F0BA82CED 9614CC325757500585387?OpenDocument.

[23] The Russian military – probably acting on orders from above - went as far as to suggest deploying sophisticated S-400 air defenses in its Far East region to protect against any potential test mishaps near the border with the DPRK. The Russian permanent representative to the UN stressed that Russia "regards the second nuclear test in the DPRK as a serious blow to international efforts to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation treaty... action, seriously threatening security and stability in the region." *Prima Media*, June 4, 2009, http://oko-planet.su/politik/newsday/11959-medvedev-rasshirenie-klubа-yadernyx-derzhav.html; Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Statement, June 12, 2009, http://www.ln.mid.ru/Brp_4.nsf/arh/745CC7A331A1D11EC32575D3005A08DA?OpenDocument. After the UN Security Council resolution was adopted, Russia "called on the partners in the DPRK to rightfully accept the will of the international community, expressed in the resolution, denounce nuclear weapons and all the military nuclear-missile programs, return to NPT, CTBT and IAEA safeguards regime, and resume participation in the six-party talks aimed at finding a mutually acceptable solution to the current knot of contradictions," http://www.rosbalt.ru/2009/07/17/656055.html.

Pyongyang's nuclear program and proliferation activities was forbidden as well. The Kremlin was also very much concerned with the increase of tensions due to the "Cheonan" incident, and stated the need for "measures against those personally responsible."[24]

However these events have not led to a basic reappraisal of Russian strategy toward the Korean problem. Moscow does not cast blame solely on Pyongyang for the failure of the diplomatic process of 2003-2008.[25] Neither has Moscow immediately accepted the South Korean version of the "Cheonan" incident. It is clear that the aggravation of situations can take place at any time and can lead to the escalation of tensions, even when all sides try to avoid it. Until a basic foundation for preserving security is established, we are doomed to see more hostilities in the future.

To achieve the above-mentioned goals, the multiparty negotiation process is essential, although it is not likely to bring immediate results, and it must put forward realistic objectives. Russian diplomats well remember that in the period of early post-Soviet romanticism, the first democratic Russian government, determined to cooperate with the United

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[24] – Statement Regarding the Situation on Korean Peninsula, May 26, 2010, http://news.kremlin.ru/news/7868.

[25] – Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov noted in September 2008: "Unlike some other members of the six-party talks, we are acting in a team spirit fashion, collectively, as was agreed initially. We try to avoid unilateral steps... The purpose is denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, not solving the bilateral problems of some participants... It would be fruitful, if all the members of the six-party talks would fulfill their obligations to the letter according to the agreements reached and not file some other requests without consulting the other partners. And of course it is important that all the DPRK partners in the six-party process actually participate in providing economic assistance to Pyongyang. That, I think, would constitute a package that would enable forward movement," Minister Lavrov's interview, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/AA10D0AC3DED12CDC32574C1002D4BB1.

States (particularly on non-proliferation, one of the areas important to Washington), joined the efforts to pressure Pyongyang, believing that the demise of the regime was not far off (although the experts never agreed to such a prognosis). As a result, Russia was sidelined during the Korean settlement process and found that decisions with direct bearing to her interests were being made without her.

Pyongyang's aims are to remove military-political threats to its regime, achieve security arrangements, prevent foreign interference and obtain economic assistance. If we look at the situation this way, denuclearization is only one track of the talks, and is actually secondary.

I see Russia as the member of the six-party talks with the least "egoistic" interests and the responsibility to manage the mechanism of peace and security in Northeast Asia, should it put forward such an agenda. However, the aftermath of the Cheonan incident, used to isolate and further pressure Pyongyang (as well as to try to disrupt Chinese support of the DPRK), leaves little hope for the early resumption of the six-party talks (at least as long as President Lee Myung-bak is in power). Anyway, if the talks could be restarted (or an alternative diplomatic process in broader terms), they should not be once again perceived (as they are by some in Washington, Seoul and Tokyo) simply as a tool to prevent further provocations and the increase of WMDs and military capabilities on the North Korean side while waiting for the regime to collapse. Under such a strategy, no major concessions would be granted to Pyongyang, while North Korea would be kept at bay by promises. The "denuclearization first, rewards later" approach seems to be the core of such a strategy. The often-repeated declaration that North Korea should be "rewarded" by economic assistance and strategic reassurances *after*

denuclearization is not taken seriously by North Koreans or their allies. This sequence needs to be reversed, or else the opportunity to achieve the nuclear de-weaponization of the DPRK may be lost. That means that engagement, both political and economic, should precede phased denuclearization. Another flaw of such an approach is that it also has a "hidden agenda": the expansion of cooperation with the West and South Korea would be used to soften and undermine the regime. Such thinking seems to me to be delusional. Overly suspicious North Koreans are aware of these dangers and will not accommodate such treatment by their adversaries. In such a case, the periodic resurgence of tensions and provocations is almost guaranteed.

Such a vision presupposes that denuclearization of the Korean peninsula should remain as a key final goal, but it cannot be the sole issue of discussion with North Korea. As prior experience has shown, unless the discussion takes into consideration the DRPK's legitimate interests, no progress can be expected. No "denuclearization first, cooperation later" scenario could ever be workable. I have long advocated the idea that it would be only in the distant future, after a new generation of leadership has emerged and relations between the DPRK and the world have improved based on the country's own transformation, that Pyongyang's need for a "nuclear deterrent" might disappear.[26]

As to a new peace regime, we should consider all the options. North Koreans say that the Korean armistice agreement and the U.S.-South Korea "Mutual Defense Treaty" are "leftovers of the Cold War era" and

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[26] – See p.e. Georgy Toloraya, *Continuity and Change in Korea: Challenges for Regional Policy and U.S.-Russia Relations*, http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/02_korea_toloraya.aspx.

should be "eliminated."[27] They see a peace treaty with the US as the cornerstone of new security arrangements. I believe the new peace and security regime should not be necessarily tied to the obscure armistice agreement, which was intended to be temporary in nature and is now almost six decades old. In fact this agreement (Article 4) called for an international conference on the Korean problem to discuss "withdrawal of all foreign troops and a peaceful solution to the Korean issue." Attempts to follow up on this proposal, including the Geneva conference of 1954, failed. However the six-party talks, convened fifty years later, could well carry the same mission. Now that we have this mechanism comprising the former signatories of the armistice agreement (of which technically South Korea is not a member), it should become the base for a new security arrangement. I believe that, once the situation in Korea calms down (I believe that won't happen before 2012), the sequence should be as follows:

- The US and the DPRK make a political declaration on the end of hostilities and mutual diplomatic recognition (ideally on a summit level) and set a target date for the DPRK to give up its nuclear weapons, fissile materials and production facilities to an international commission made up of representatives of nuclear states (P-5) and the IAEA.

- The six parties make a declaration supporting that move and avowing their decision to monitor and cross-guarantee it. The guiding principles of peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia are included into the

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[27] - *Rodong Shinmun*, April 28, 2010.

declaration, along with the possibility of setting up a regional mechanism for monitoring security issues.

- Japan normalizes relations with the DPRK without conditions and enters the process of negotiating bilateral concerns (abductees, war-time compensation).

- North and South Korea convene a summit meeting, confirming previous summit meeting declarations and establishing a mutually agreed upon agenda of national reconciliation.

- Each of the members of the six-party talks signs bilateral treaties with the five other partners confirming their obligations to sincerely implement the agreed principles and monitor their fulfillment by other members. Copies of these documents are submitted to the UN, which is also entrusted with monitoring and control functions.

- A declaration on international economic assistance to the DPRK is adopted, and to this end an international committee is set up, which is to coordinate all aid to the DPRK with the purpose of modernizing its economy (including the installation of nuclear energy power generation facilities).

- As the target date of the DPRK's abandoning of nuclear weapons approaches, the Six-Party Nuclear Committee, with the participation of the IAEA, works out the modalities, including verification. Should no agreement be reached, all preceding agreements are declared null and void and relations with North Korea are severed. That would present a strong stimulus for the North Korean leadership, having

already tasted the benefits of détente and engagement, to make the right decision.

- Verification and monitoring mechanisms are set up to check for compliance with all the clauses of the agreements.

Of course for this to happen, a certain level of mutual trust must be achieved, which today does not appear to be close.

North Korea's Future: Continuity and Change

The approach suggested above presupposes that the North Korean regime is stable and that the world has to negotiate with the existing power elite, rather than waiting for it to change. However in the West there are widespread expectations of a forthcoming collapse in Pyongyang. How great is the possibility of the DPRK imploding and being absorbed by South Korea? Or China (meaning a pro-Chinese regime)? Or being divided between them? Will it persist in its isolation and preserve the system, and for how long? Will it try to transform and then collapse (back to question # 1)? Or will it evolve into a more or less "normal" state – i.e. "conventionalize"?

These options are being considered everywhere, including Russia. The possibility of a collapse is generally seen in Russia as remote. Of course, it is not totally excluded - even a military conflict or an international blockade of North Korea is possible. For example, if conservative elderly leaders, lacking Kim Jong-il's abilities and legitimacy, were to gain power after Kim Jong-il's demise, policies aimed at "freezing time," like the

attempt to confiscate the capital of the newly emerging entrepreneurial class through the currency reform of November 2009, might well result in an eventual internal implosion of the country.

The de facto occupation of the North by the South following this would have innumerable and grave consequences, ranging from a guerilla war to a total economic disorganization. Such scenarios are discussed elsewhere and I will not dwell much on them.[28] One thing that should be said is that this is a bad choice and should be avoided at all costs – at least from the Russian point of view. But the North Korean elites do have a self-preservation instinct. Hopefully a pragmatic new leadership, while anxious about maintaining the system, may nevertheless try to reinvigorate the country, starting with a cautious adaptation of a new economic guidance system. Besides, China would do its utmost to prevent a collapse, as demonstrated by its renewed expressions of support for Kim Jong-il during his China visit in May 2010.

Of course there is a possibility of a "soft" change of regime with Chinese involvement – which might range from Beijing sending troops to control the collapsing country to installing a pro-Chinese faction in power in case of turmoil. Such a scenario would also mean an increase in regional tension (frictions between China and South Korea, supported by the US) and a possible arms race, resulting from Asian perceptions of a new hegemony by Beijing. However even in such a case, the current middle-level elites would keep their influence if not their positions, as there is simply no alternative to them at present, due to the closed nature of the country.

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[28] – See p.e. Georgy Bulychev, "One Way Out of the Korean Mess," *History News Network*, Februry 14, 2005, http://hnn.us/roundup/entries/10251.html.

From my point of view a slow *evolution* of the DPRK should be promoted. North Korea simply has not been given that chance; the short window of opportunity in 2000-2002 was not used by the cautious leaders in Pyongyang to the fullest extent. In order to take advantage of a similar chance in the future, the stability of current elite must be guaranteed, but change itself would have to proceed along with a generational shift in the leadership. Engagement is the key word for such a scenario. Engagement may produce fertile soil for an eventual reform of the political economy,[29] regardless of what the die-hard orthodox communist leaders might think about it. This opinion is supported by many Russian experts.[30] In such a case, as one researcher puts it, "The position of a reformed North Korea in the newly emerging map of economic interests can be surprisingly strong. The DPRK is located at the very center of the world's most vibrant and dynamically developing region. By playing his cards shrewdly, Kim Jong-il might create conditions for socio-economic revitalization of the North that will be a positive contribution to the eventual unification of the Korean peninsula."[31]

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[29] - See the discussion of the report, "North Korea Inside Out: The Case for Economic Engagement," produced by the Independent Task Force convened by the Asia Society's Center on U.S.-China Relations and the University of California's Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/09083ASTaskForce.pdf, http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/09083Response.html.

[30] - The Third Russia-Korea Forum, Diplomatic Academy, Moscow, 2002; Korea: A View from Russia - Proceedings of the 11th Koreanologists' Conference, Moscow, March 30, 2007 (Moscow: Institute of Far Eastern Studies, 2007).

[31] - Leonid Petrov, "Russia Is Key to North Korea's Plight," *Asia Times*, July 24, 2008, http://atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/JG24Ag04.html.

The changes[32] could start with the economy.[33] The essence of reform would be gradual "marketization," at first on the microeconomic level, which has already taken root to such an extent that it cannot be exterminated.[34] The recent attempt to return to the conservation of the Kim Il Sung system and self-isolation might represent a final, short-lived push by the leaders to rule in the old way. The unprecedented de facto admission by the authorities in March 2010 of the failure of the currency reform of November 2009, initially meant to curtail the market forces, well illustrates this point (drama is added by rumors that former Planning Commission Chairman Park Nam Gi was chosen as a scapegoat and executed for "damaging the people's economy").[35] Later, in June 2010, the government was widely reorganized in an attempt by the political leadership to shed responsibility for its disastrous economic decisions. The failed reform attempt revealed the limits to the state's power to regulate the economic activities of the population and the swift realization of this fact by the authorities.

What we now have in North Korea is actually a multi-sectoral economy, including not only state but also market and shadow sectors. Apart from individual entrepreneurship by the broad masses of North

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32 - For more details see Georgy Toloraya, 'The Economic Future of North Korea: Will the Market Rule?' in *Korea Economic Institute Academic Paper Series on Korea*, Vol. 2 (Washington, DC: 2007).

33 - See p.e. Phillip Park, "The Transition to a Market-Oriented Economy: Applying an Institutionalist Perspective to the DPR Korea" in *Driving Forces of Socialist Transformation: North Korea and the Experience of Europe and East Asia* (ed.), Rudiger Frank and Sabine Burghart, Wien, Praesens Verlag, 2009, pp. 300-306.

34 - For a detailed report, see p.e. A. Lankov and Kim Sok Hyan, "North Korean Traders: The Sprouts of Market Economy in a Post-Stalinist Society" in *Korea: History and Present* (Moscow: Moscow State University, 2008), pp. 192-205.

35 - "Execution Confirmed by Capital Source," http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk01500&num=6204.

Koreans, the appearance of semi-state/semi-private production and trading conglomerates under the "wing" of government and regional power structures (including the army, special services, central and regional government structures) is already taking place. The economic structure may eventually change, making the country more competitive and affluent. This would include the decline of outdated and non-competitive branches and the emergence of industries based on North Korea's comparative advantages, such as cheap and relatively well-educated labor, mineral resources, central East Asian location/transit potential, and the potential for easy access to foreign capital (chiefly of South Korean, Chinese, and maybe even Japanese origin), despite setbacks such as unfortunate measures by the North Korean authorities to confiscate foreign property (e.g. the South Korean facilities in Mount Kumgang). This process would probably gain dynamism after the change of power in Pyongyang.

Economic growth would bring about socio-political stabilization. Communist ideology might eventually give way to "social-nationalism" and "patriotism" (with the sacred role of the founder of the state) as the foundation of a new social mentality. The political system in the long run might evolve into a sort of "constitutional monarchy" or a "collective leadership" with much greater feedback from the grassroots level for Kim Jong-il's successor. A corresponding decrease of tensions and confrontation between the DPRK with the outside world would set the ground for military confidence-building measures and the eventual creation of a multilateral system of international arrangements for Korean security, as described earlier.

Of course, this is likely a long time away. However, embarking on this road is the only real chance of enabling North Korean leaders to

conclude that they no longer need a nuclear deterrent, voluntarily abandon their nuclear and other WMD ambitions (for example, the "South African variant," in which the elite voluntarily gave up existing secret nuclear potential when the threat from African neighbors disappeared with the dismantlement of the apartheid regime), and reduce their level of militarization.

Why were similar approaches only moderately successful in freezing and at times even halting the DPRK nuclear program, but so far always false starts? The single most important reason is the absence of a genuine commitment by the opponents of North Korea to coexist with the regime. It should be noted that insincere and half-hearted "partial" engagement with an underlying intention for a regime change does more harm than good.

The responsibility for embarking on the road to a real solution largely lies with the US. However the Obama administration has not - so far, at least - worked out a comprehensive Korean strategy; instead it has taken a "wait and see" or "strategic patience" approach, while counting on sanctions and isolation to weaken North Korean regime and make it more receptive to making concessions. The "denuclearization first" theory still leads to an impasse both on the US-North Korea bilateral track and in the multi-party format. Although President Obama in November 2009 suggested a "different future" for North Korea if it denuclearizes,[36] there

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[36] – President Obama said on November 14, 2009 in Tokyo, "Working in tandem with our partners -- supported by direct diplomacy -- the United States is prepared to offer North Korea a different future. Instead of an isolation that has compounded the horrific repression of its own people, North Korea could have a future of international integration. Instead of gripping poverty, it could have a future of economic opportunity -- where trade and investment and tourism can offer the North Korean people the chance at a better life. And instead of increasing insecurity, it could have a future of greater security and respect."

is still no evidence that a strategic US commitment to coexist with the present DPRK leaders has been made. The paradigm of US-DPRK coexistence should be worked out based on the assumption that the Pyongyang regime is here to stay and should be recognized. China and Russia would have few reservations about supporting such an approach and would help to promote the dialogue, as normalization in Korea corresponds with their strategic goals both in the region and in their relations vis-à-vis the United States. However in the wake of the "Cheonan" incident, Washington has become almost a hostage of Seoul's policy and cannot take any steps without Seoul's consent. Any new developments will probably not be possible prior to a change of administration in Seoul, as North Koreans are deeply mistrustful of Lee Myung-bak's government and will make no concessions while it is in power. Another factor is the need to consolidate the basis for hereditary power transition. So no major changes can be expected before 2012, which could well become a watershed year for North Korea.

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