

Russia's Policy towards the Korean Peninsula at the close of XX

: beginning of XXI centuries

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논문 요약

남북한 모두에 대한 러시아의 실용적 접근은 전략적 과정의 통합된 부분이며, 지난 60년간의 기본 이해관계와 연속된 목표를 반영하고 있다. 1991년부터 러시아는 남북한을 동반자로 간주해왔다. 러시아는 북한의 핵무기 보유가 세계 비확산 체제를 유지하는 목표뿐 아니라 자국의 안보 이익에 근본적으로 배치된다고 견지에서 한반도 비핵화를 확고히 지지한다.

동시에 러시아의 최우선적 요구는 한반도의 평화와 안전, 안정을 유지하는 것이다. 러시아 정부는 북한과의 국경을 맞대고 있는 까닭에 어떠한 무력분쟁도 러시아의 안보에 커다란 손실을 끼칠 것으로 보고 있다.

핵무기 제거를 위해 북한에 대한 군사행동을 지지할 것인지 아니면 한반도의 평화 유지를 위해 행동할 것인지 선택의 기로에 빠진다면 러시아 지도부는 분명 후자를 택할 것이다. 러시아는 북한의 비핵화에 확고한 입장을 가지지만 그것은 오직 평화적 수단에 의한 것이어야 한다. 한반도 통일에 대한 러시아의 접근 역시 평화적이고 지속적인 기반의 통일에 목적을 둔 한국민의 의지와 열망을 지지하는 것이다.

주제어 : 한반도, 우호관계, 비핵화, 균형정책, 평화와 안정, 전략적 동반자

I. Introduction

Policy toward the Korean peninsula is an important component of Russia's general strategy toward the Asia-Pacific region, which is now regarded by Moscow as a crucially important area. This growing emphasis on Asia is evidenced by numerous facts: President Vladimir Putin's increased participation in APEC summits including the November 2005 meeting in Pusan, South Korea, and Russia's development of a dialogue partnership with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). During the first Russia-ASEAN summit, held in Malaysia just before the East Asian Summit in December 2005, President Putin gave a speech to the participants of the nascent East Asian Community (EAC), a new multidimensional integration association in the region.¹⁾ The current key directions of Russia's Northeast Asia and particularly Korean policy are defined by the Concept of Foreign Policy adopted in 2013.²⁾

A pragmatic and calculating approach towards the DPRK and the Korean Peninsula in general became an integral part of the strategic course.

For instance, starting from the beginning of this century Russia-North Korea relations have reached an unprecedented level. Moscow has gained unique and exclusive communications capabilities with

1) "The Eastern Vector of Russian Foreign Policy." December 28, 2005. www.mid.ru (Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation).

2) "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation approved by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin February 12, 2013." [http://www.mid.ru/bdcmp/ns-osn-doc.nsf/e2f289bea62097f9c325787a0034c255/c32577ca0017434944257b160051bf7f\(15April,2014\)](http://www.mid.ru/bdcmp/ns-osn-doc.nsf/e2f289bea62097f9c325787a0034c255/c32577ca0017434944257b160051bf7f(15April,2014)).

Pyongyang based on the development of trust between the two states' leaderships at the highest political levels, described in North Korean terminology as the "two states' leaders' personal friendship."

Above all, it should be stressed that Moscow's policies toward the Korean peninsula are determined by Russia's serious and legitimate strategic interests in Korea. The fundamental goal of the preservation of peace and stability on the Korean peninsula defines Russia's policy toward Korea and by extension its position on any settlement of the North Korean nuclear crisis. Russia stands firmly behind a peaceful resolution of the crisis, achieved through diplomacy and negotiation.

The use of military force to resolve the North Korea crisis is totally unacceptable to Russia for several reasons. First, the security of Russia's Far Eastern regions would be inevitably affected by an armed confrontation in Korea. Large concentrations of American military forces (likely similar to the number of troops involved in the 2003 invasion of Iraq) on the borders of Russia and China would certainly cause elevated tensions. Combat operations would likely be fierce and sustained, further increasing risks of a wider conflict. As a result, three of the world's nuclear-armed powers (the U.S., the PRC, and the Russian Federation, not to mention North Korea itself) might place their forces on high alert. American munitions were found across the borders of a number of Iraq's neighbors during the 2003 invasion. In such a situation, an accident could lead to catastrophic consequences. Given the complexities of combat and the region's geography, the potential for spiraling tensions is high.

Second, taking into consideration the fact that both of the conflict's

potential belligerents (the U.S. and the DPRK) have nuclear weapons, it is unfortunately possible to envision a nuclear exchange. The massive radioactive clouds generated by such an incident could easily reach Russian terrain. In addition, the flow of refugees into Russia fleeing such a conflict would create the possibility for an ecological and humanitarian disaster. A military conflict could also increase the possibility of an outflow of Russian citizens from its Far Eastern region to the west, which may dramatically affect the country's demographic situation.

Third, Russia has sunk considerable amounts of capital in to numerous large-scale, long-term international infrastructure projects involving the Korean peninsula, such as oil and gas pipelines and Trans-Korean and Trans-Siberian railroads junctions. These projects are of crucial importance to the economic revitalization of the Russian Far East. Needless to say, in the case of a new Korean War, these projects—and Russian economic interests—would be severely damaged.

Fourth, Moscow believes that due to sharing a common border with North Korea, any Korean armed conflict will unavoidably inflict heavy damage to the military—and—political, economic, environmental, humanitarian, demographic, etc. security of Russia.

In this way, in a hypothetical situation whereupon Russian leadership was facing a dilemma whether to support military action against North Korea aimed at elimination of its nuclear weapons or act towards preserving peace on the Korean peninsula, Moscow will opt for the second path. In other words, Russia is firmly committed to the nuclear disarmament of North Korea but exclusively by peaceful diplomatic means.

Based on access to unique information, a long history of interaction, and many contacts within North Korea, Russia has concluded that the widespread belief in Kim Jong Un's impending collapse, particularly prevalent among certain circles in Seoul and the West, is a miscalculation, and that in the short- to mid-term regime change in Pyongyang may only be achieved by a major foreign military intervention. Therefore, observers in Moscow are confident that pressure and blanket economic sanctions intended to bring about regime change will not result in North Korean political transformation or the erosion of domestic support for Kim, but rather will only increase tensions and the probability of a military confrontation.

The baseline of Russia's modern Korean policy is the perception of both the Republic of Korea and Democratic People's Republic of Korea as independent states and close neighbors, which should be treated discretely and independently.

Moscow regards both Korean states as partners. Their relationships have independent value to Moscow and rest on principles of good neighborly interaction and cooperation.

Moscow enjoys mature multilateral comprehensive cooperation with Seoul. Suffice it to underline the achieved level of bilateral trade volume of \$ 25 billion and two countries citizens visa-free travel status.

Russia maintains a firm and genuine stand in favor of nuclear-free status of the Korean Peninsula and proceeds from understanding that the North Korean possession of nuclear weapons stands in fundamental contradiction to its national security interests as well as goals of sustaining the global nonproliferation regime.

II. Historical overview of the bilateral relations between the new democratic Russia and both Korean states.

There are reasons to divide the 3 stages 1991-1995; 1995-1999 years; 2000-at the present time (in the third stage framework is possible to single out some specific phases).

1. Stage 1-The Yeltsin administration

Throughout the administration of President Boris Yeltsin, North Korea was seen in official Moscow circles almost as a "persona non grata." During this period, Russia was seeking legitimacy and membership in the various clubs of the major democratic powers. Moscow's strategic orientation became decidedly "Atlantic." (This period recently has been labeled "democratic romanticism," or, in the words of penultimate USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs Aleksandr Bessmertnykh, as the period of "ultimate naïveté.") During this time, Moscow's policies were reminiscent of the proverb "to be more Catholic than the Pope." Russian policy toward the Korean peninsula was similarly one-sided and featured unilateral rapprochement with the Republic of Korea and maximum estrangement from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Russian foreign policy during this period officially focused on the country's "inevitable removal from the DPRK,"³⁾ and Russia's relations with North Korea were effectively frozen. The new liberal elite decided

3) "The Concept of Russian Federation Foreign Policy." *Diplomaticheskii vestnik*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, special issue, January 1993, p. 16.

that maintaining ties with a “totalitarian regime” did not meet Russia’s democratic ideals. For example, Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev stressed in 1996 that Russia was ready to sell armaments to all comers, excluding North Korea.⁴⁾

Russia’s primary objective was to prevent the advent of nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula, a position that aligned with Western interests. However, Western powers did not allow room for any specific Russian interests.

Following the bilateral settlement of the 1993–1994 nuclear crises by the United States and the DPRK, Washington’s role in Korean affairs increased dramatically. China’s importance also grew when it acted as virtually the lone “defender” of Pyongyang, rejecting any activities on the peninsula that did not take into account China’s interests. Owing to the creation of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), a consortium tasked with the construction of a nuclear power station in DPRK, coordination of Korea policy between the United States, South Korea and Japan was re-adjusted, and Tokyo was also able to more actively promote its interests in the settlement of the Korean issue. Russia was now effectively limited to the position of an observer.⁵⁾

Naturally, other players in the “Korean game” viewed Moscow’s position as an indication of its weakness, which prompted them to totally disregard Russia’s interests. The “2+2” negotiating mechanism created in 1996 (the DPRK and South Korea, the United States and

China) left Russia without a role to play in the settlement; Moscow’s suggestion of adopting a “2+4” formula was turned down. South Korea began to view its relations with Russia mainly through the prism of exerting pressure on Pyongyang.

The Russian “discovery” of a dynamically developing country—South Korea—gave rise to big hopes. South Korea succeeded in instilling in the minds of Russia’s new leaders the notion that isolation of the DPRK was a necessary attribute (if not the precondition) of improving relations with South Korea. For example, Seoul emphatically urged Moscow to cut cooperation with Pyongyang, promising unlimited increases in trade and investment. Accordingly, Moscow ended its bilateral ties and communications with the “Great Leader” of the North, almost totally destroying its formerly privileged position. However, Russia was surprised to hear later from the same South Korean representatives that Russia’s lack of leverage over North Korea had caused Seoul’s interest in cooperation with Moscow to decrease correspondingly. The Russian elite’s “democratic romanticism,” which sometimes fostered unwarranted trustfulness and a lack of maturity, contributed to this weakening of Russia’s position in Korean affairs.

2. The stage 2 –Mr. Primakov attempts to balance the political course.

The unfavorable condition of Russia’s relationships and strategy toward both Korean states did not satisfy the pragmatic wing of the Russian government, and resulted in efforts to change Russia’s policy

4) *Defense Nationale*, October 1996. In: ITAR–TASS Kompas, No. 45, November 7, 1996, p. 22.

5) Toloraya G., “Korean Peninsula and Russia.” *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn* (International Affairs), No. 12, Moscow, 2002, pp. 63–72.

approach.

Russian diplomats began to realize that Moscow's relationship with Pyongyang had to be improved in order to achieve a balanced position on the Korean peninsula. In the fall of 1996, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs from both countries signed a plan covering diplomatic exchange and an agreement on cultural and scientific cooperation for 1997–1998. This agreement became the basis for the conclusion of numerous inter departmental agreements in the following years.

The Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs also began making active efforts elsewhere in the region to neutralize any adverse effects on Russian security arising from changes in the balance of forces on the Korean peninsula. For instance, in October 1996 Foreign Minister Yevgeniy Primakov offered an initiative for enhanced Russian–Japanese cooperation on Korea at a ceremony dedicated to the 40th anniversary of the re–establishment of diplomatic relations between Russia and Japan. Primakov argued that the two countries shared an interest in not being “forced out” of the diplomatic process on the Korean peninsula, and that strengthened Russian–Japanese cooperation could enhance political stability both in Korea and in the Asia–Pacific region as a whole.⁶⁾

Russian diplomats continued to develop the idea of a broad international forum on Korea with participation of both Korean states, all permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, Japan, and some specialized United Nations organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency. According to a statement by then–Vice–Minister

of Foreign Affairs Grigory Karasin, a formula for the resolution of issues on the Korean peninsula needed to recognize the realities on the ground in Korea. However that time the idea was not supported by some states including the USA and the DPRK.⁷⁾ After some hesitation, Moscow took the position of “positive neutrality” toward the idea of four–party talks, declaring that any steps toward the reduction of tensions on the Korean peninsula were welcomed.

During a visit to the Republic of Korea in July 1997, Foreign Minister Primakov underlined that “as the contours of the talks format are now showing themselves as ‘two plus two,’ both Korea plus People’s Republic of China and the U.S., we have no reasons to resist and will be assisting them. Along with this we believe it to be useful to broaden the limits of such talks up to calling an international conference... Moscow aspires not only to be associated with this process, but it can even enter the club of regulating participants, which are not directly involved in the conflict.”⁸⁾

While in Seoul, Primakov decisively explained to President Kim Young Sam why Russia “can positively influence the situation on the Korean peninsula, based on two factors: first of all, relationships with both Korean states, which other countries involved in the process of inter–Korean regulation lack; and secondly, the ‘high degree of development’ which the relationships between Russia and the U.S., China, and Japan have reached and with which we could coordinate our line in relation to regulating the Korean problem with the three largest international

7) Seung–Ho Joo, “Russian Policy on Korean Unification in the Post–Cold War Era.” *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 69, no 1, Spring 1996, p. 48.

8) *Dipcourier*, No. 14 (August 1997).

6) *Diplomatic Courier (Dipcourier)*, No. 15(41)(October 1996), p. 14.

players.”

In January 1997 Vice–Minister of Foreign Affairs Grigory Karasin added momentum to the shift, stating that the Russian Ambassador to North Korea, Valery Denisov “is apt to eliminate the obstacles in the way to development of the Russia–DPRK relationship” and is sure that “Russia is ultimately interested in peace and stability at its Far East borders and is going to maintain relationships with both Korean states in such a way as to keep relationships with one side from harming relationships with the other.”⁹⁾ Vice–Minister Karasin confirmed during a stopover in Beijing on his way to Pyongyang that “Moscow is going to a play more active role in issues of the Korean peninsula.” Many journalists have argued that one of Karasin’s tasks was to prepare for the visit to North Korea by “not only the Minister of Foreign Affairs Primakov,” but also to prepare for meetings at a higher level.¹⁰⁾

3. Stage 3—beginning from the year 2000

The visit of the Russian Federation Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov to the DPRK in February 2000, and the signing of the Treaty on Friendship, Good–Neighborly Relations and Cooperation, finally brought about the normalization of bilateral relations between Russia and the DPRK. Both sides noted similar views on diverse international problems: common concerns in regards to NATO expansion to the East; American development of a global anti–missile defense capability and theater

missile defense in Northeast Asia.; and Pyongyang’s support for the actions of Russian Federation forces in anti–terrorist operations in Chechnya. South Korean diplomats assert that in the course of Ivanov’s February visit, he managed to convince his North Korean counterparts of the attractiveness of DPRK participation in the ASEAN regional forum and to urge them to make a decision regarding membership.

III. Turning point in bilateral relations

President Putin’s arrival in the Kremlin marked a real turning–point in relations between Moscow and Pyongyang. His policy toward the DPRK may be regarded as an antipode to the previous Yeltsin administration approach: bilateral political relations underwent a facelift, and special relations based on “personal friendship,” in North Korean terminology, developed between the leaders of the Russian Federation and DPRK.

The first summit meeting in the history of Russian–Korean relations took place in July 2000 when a Joint Declaration was signed,¹¹⁾ the first international document signed by Kim Jong Il as leader of the DPRK.¹²⁾ Two visits by Kim Jong Il to Russia followed in the years 2001 and 2002. In the Moscow Declaration of 2001, support of the trilateral railroad project was particularly stressed for the first time

9) *Dipcourier*, No. 16 (October 1996).

10) *Izvestiya*, January 23, 1997.

11) “DPRK–RUSSIA JOINT DECLARATION. Pyongyang, July 19, 2000.” http://nautilus.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/CanKor_VTK_2000_07_19_dprk_russia_joint_declaration.pdf (11 April, 2014).

12) *Diplomaticheskii vestnik* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation), 2000, p. 8.

on such high level.¹³⁾

The leader of the North Korean people appreciated the brave step of the Russian president, who had been the first head of a leading Western democracy to visit the capital of the “pariah-country” in July 2000. Kim Jong Il did not forget Putin’s efforts and reciprocated the gesture in July 2003, by insisting to the U.S. that Moscow be included in the Six-Party Talks.

Kim Jong Il has warm personal relations with two other key figures in the upper echelons of Russian’s Korea policymaking management: the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Representative of the Russian Federation President in Far-East Federal District, Konstantin Pulikovsky, and the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea Andrei Karlov. These high level officials accompanied Kim Jong Il on his train during his first 24-day trip across the Russian Federation in 2001.¹⁴⁾ Pulikovsky later became a frequent personal guest of Kim Jong Il in Pyongyang. Ambassador Karlov, who was acknowledged by Kim Jong Il in the memorable train-trip before the official presentation of credentials, is now honored with a few personal meetings each month with the DPRK’s head of state. Often such meetings take the form of long, informal conversations.

One of the latest symbolic gestures from Pyongyang toward Moscow has been a renaissance of Orthodox Church activity in North Korea. In June 2006, in eastern Pyongyang near the centrally located modern

avenue, Tongil (Unification) Road, a ceremony was held to celebrate the founding of Holy Trinity, the first orthodox church in the DPRK, with space for 500 congregants. Construction of the church is planned to be completed by the end of 2006. In the beginning of 2005, a wedding ceremony for a North Korean clergyman was conducted at this church by the Hong Kong-based Russian Orthodox Church priest Father Dionisy.¹⁵⁾ These examples illustrate Russia’s unique role in present-day life of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

China’s “vital” role in nuclear crisis diplomacy and the importance of visits to North Korea by representatives from the PRC have been widely celebrated by Western media sources. It is commonly perceived by international media outlets that China is the only state able to persuade Pyongyang to participate in the multilateral talks. Of course, there are grounds for such an assertion. However, this perception is also a result of Washington’s multi-sided strategy, which is aimed at drawing Beijing to its side and away from Pyongyang, while simultaneously attempting to push the Russian Federation out of Korean affairs. Western media sources often ignore the fact that the strength and intensity of high-level Russian-North Korean dialogue is unmatched by any other country’s influence in Pyongyang. However, Russia’s importance is often downplayed or misunderstood. For example, one Japanese scholar noted that “the beginning of the North Korean nuclear crisis in October 2002...relegated Moscow to a marginalized position on the Korean issue” and that a “retrenchment stage” in bilateral relations had begun.¹⁶⁾

13) “Putin, Kim sign Moscow declaration.” <http://www.russijournal.com/node/7391> (15 April, 2014).

14) K. Pulikovsky, *Eastern Express. Around Russia together with Kim Jong Il*. Moscow, 2002, pp. 63-64, 167-168.

15) *Seylsky Vestnik*, Seoul, February 2, 2005 [in Russian].

To understand the groundlessness of such an assertion, it is necessary to review the high-level political contacts between Moscow and Pyongyang. The events of 2002 provide a telling example of the strength of these contacts. In 2002, a number of Russian policymakers visited North Korea, including President Putin's Far East Federal District Representative Pulikovskiy (in February and in April), Russian Federation Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivanov (in July), head of the Far-East Military District General Yuri Yakubov, St. Petersburg Governor Vladimir Yakovlev (in April), Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov (in December), and Russian Federation Minister of Railways Gennadi Fadeev (in October–November). During the same period, the following North Korean officials visited Russia: Chairman of the Supreme People's Assembly Choe Thae Bok visited Moscow in March; Deputy Chairman of the Ministers Cabinet Cho Chang Dok visited the Far-East in April; after a 15-year break, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Paek Nam Sun visited Moscow and the Far-East in May; and the Chairman of Pyongyang People's Committee Ryang Man Kil visited Moscow in January 2002¹⁶⁾ and in February 2003.

Also in 2002, cooperation between different offices and organizations of the two countries, including military affairs, was being reconstructed and redeveloped. In October, a delegation from the DPRK's Ministry of the People's Military, headed by the Deputy Head of the General Headquarters of the Ministry of People's Military Lee Men Su, visited

the Russian Federation. At the beginning of November a delegation from the Air Forces of the Korean People's Army, headed by General-in-Chief of the Air Forces Oh Kum Chul, visited Russia. In April, a delegation from the DPRK's Main Department for Atomic Energy, headed by its Chief Lee Choi Saeng, visited Moscow, as well as a delegation from the Academy of Sciences, headed by its Vice-President Kang Dong Kyun, who afterwards visited Novosibirsk.

Undoubtedly, the visit by DPRK's Chairman of the State Defense Committee Kim Jong Il to the Russian Far-East in August 2002 marked an unprecedented event in Russia–DPRK bilateral relations. It was Kim's third meeting in two years with President Putin.

To reiterate, the above meetings all took place over only one year. Hopes for improved Russia–DPRK relations have become a reality. The trend of dynamic, high-level political exchanges between the two states continues to the present day.

In 2004, the DPRK was visited by Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov (July 4–5), who conducted very intense negotiations in Pyongyang. In particular, a new protocol on the exchange between the states' respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs was signed. Such a high level of Russia–North Korea political dialogue demanded continuous consultation and synchronization, which was realized during this visit.

Minister Lavrov's meeting with Kim Jong Il was a 90-minute conversation, during which the Minister personally transmitted a message from President Putin. Many experts were surprised when Pyongyang accepted, with understanding and composure, the explanations for Russia's joining the U.S.–sponsored Proliferation Security Initiative

16) Yoshinori Takeda, "Putin's foreign policy toward North Korea." *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific Advance Access*, March 3, 2006, pp. 1, 12.

17) Vorontsov A., "Russia and the Korean Peninsula: Contemporary Realities and Prospects." *Far Eastern Affairs*, No. 3, 2002, pp. 44–59.

(PSI), particularly given that the program is often seen as directed against North Korea. This understanding is further evidence of the special status of Russia–DPRK bilateral relations. At the follow–up press–conference dedicated to the results of the meeting, Minister Lavrov stated that Kim Jong Il expressed his gratitude for the confirmation of Russia's readiness and determination to develop relations with Pyongyang on the basis of the 2000 Treaty on Friendship, Good–Neighborly Relations and Cooperation. In that agreement, both parties, among other things, took obligations “to refrain from… participation in any actions and measures, aimed against the sovereignty, independence and territorial wholeness of the other party.” Kim Jong Il also underlined North Korea's gratitude for Russia's support following the DPRK tragedy at the railway station Ryongchon in April 2004, as well as for the 35,000 tons of grain sent by Russia. In Minister Lavrov's words, “the leader of the DPRK expressed gratitude for the continuously felt support given by Russia.”

The two nations reached an understanding that within the framework of the Six–Party Talks of the final agreement on the regulation of the nuclear problem on the Korean peninsula, that it is necessary to confirm North Korea's right to peaceful development of a nuclear energy complex, given Pyongyang's assurance to participate in the NPT and activities of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Minister Lavrov noted: “We sensed that our Korean friends have an understanding of this particular position of Russia.”¹⁸⁾

18) “Russia Foreign Ministry Sergey Lavrov press–conference dealing with the outcome of the visit to the DPRK on July 5, 2004.” shorthand report, 1541–06–07–2004, www.mid.ru. (06 July 2004).

In addition, the legal and contractual basis of Russia–DPRK bilateral relations has been constantly expanding. During the period 1996–2005, roughly 40 intergovernmental and interdepartmental agreements were concluded, in the areas of air communication, customs, timber, fishery, navigation satellites, investment encouragement and double taxation avoidance, and anti–crime cooperation. In December 2005, Pyongyang productively hosted the Russia–North Korea Fishery Area Cooperation Joint Commission's 19th meeting.

It's important to stress that the last foreign visit in his life, three months before his death, Kim Jong Il also traveled to Russia to meet the RF President D. Medvedev in Ulan–Ude city in August of 2011 year where he officially announced the readiness to come back into the six–party talks as well as to push forward another large trilateral cooperation project–construction of a gas pipeline from Russia to the ROK via North Korea.¹⁹⁾

IV. Current New Phase.

The fact is that during the last few months Russia–DPRK relations achieved new heights. Moscow got unique and exclusive communicatory capabilities based on extreme extensive dialogue at high political level elites.

However the phenomena often met with unequal assessment in the

19) “Talks Held between Top Leaders of DPRK and Russia.” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/dprk/2011/dprk-110824-kcna06.htm> (5 May 2014).

world. In general the matter remains unknown in public opinion. Some times there are attempts to underestimate or deemphasize the fact, or even to contradict or criticize Moscow for having “too” inmate relations with Pyongyang.

In 2013 there was perpetual movement between crisis and negotiations. First it swung toward hard-line confrontation, but after a blast of militarism in March-April, mostly at the rhetorical level, in the second half of the year it swung toward the positive, just as energetically as North Korea's “peace offensive,” assessed by Seoul as “charm offensives” that continued into the beginning of 2014. As a result, the world saw the resumption of contacts between the two Koreas and a restart of activity in the joint industrial zone in Kaesong, which the North Koreans had shut down when the spring crisis was at its height. North Korean representatives said that the main reason for their decision to abandon war for peace was the lessened threat to North Korea's security once military exercises and their preparations were over in the south of the peninsula. In 2014 February two important events in the context of inter-Korean relations were held: high-level negotiations between representatives of the North and South (for the first time since 2008) and a meeting of members of separated families (also after a long hiatus).

But the next round of annual U.S.–South Korean military exercises, Key Resolve and Foal Eagle conducted from late February through April 2014 and the following “Max Thunder,” large scale Ari Force drill interrupted the process.

Russia paid great attention to the process and reacted by two Foreign

Ministry comments that surprised many observers. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to deviate from usual diplomatic balanced approaches and put it straight in the statements issued on March 31 and April 10, 2014 saying that these provocative actions are turning into the main source of tension in the Korean peninsula…It was emphasized that the aggravation of the situation always coincides with the large-scale exercises of the United States and South Korea. For instance, the March 31 statement says, “It cannot be disregarded that periodic aggravation in this region occurs at the same time as the annual large-scale military training exercises of the United States and the Republic of Korea. We have commented several times that it is inadmissible to have excessive military activities in North-East Asia, all the more so when there are provocative displays of mock bombings using strategic bombers, exercises of landing operations to seize some “administrative centers” of foreign states and so on. We urgently appeal to all the interested parties to demonstrate maximum restraint, avoid any statements or actions, which lead to further deterioration and escalation of the situation in the Korean Peninsula and the surrounding area.”²⁰⁾

The April 10 statement stresses that, “Trends in a build-up of joint military actions by the United States and the Republic of Korea, in the Korean Peninsula, cannot but cause concern—especially in conditions, when traces of the reduction of tensions are replaced by the mutual aggravation of rhetoric and intensification of confrontation. The large

20) Комментарий Департамента информации и печати МИД России по поводу разрыва обстановки вокруг Корейского полуострова. 31.03.2014.http://mi-d.ru/brp_4.nsf/newsline/20F81A396349C2D844257CAC0045E217 (11 May, 2014).

–scale exercise Foal Eagle (which will be conducted up to the 18 April) has not yet been completed, but Seoul and Washington are organizing new air exercises using a record amount of aviation equipment, as is being announced. It is to be noted that during these exercises they will develop accurate firing at targets located in the territory of the expected enemy and ensure supplies to subversive groups behind enemy lines. We have pointed out many times that the build–up of military activities in North–East Asia, going beyond the framework of existing threats, not only does not contribute to the revival of the situation, but also will incur serious consequences for peace and stability in the region. We will repeat yet again: let us stop making stakes at forceful variants of settlement of the problems in the Korean Peninsula and start forming multilateral security mechanisms in NEA. All the issues in question must be resolved using political and diplomatic means only, through consultations and negotiations.”²¹⁾

Naturally, the Russian FM's tone reflects such considerable change on the Korea peninsula situation is related to the reassessment of many key points. Russia–North Korea relations of course is one of the main one among them.

There are grounds to argue that nowadays the new phase of Russia's policy on the Korean peninsula and in relations with the DPRK is taking place.

At present, Russian–North Korean relations are experiencing a sort of renaissance, which stands out in contrast against the background

of the recent cold snap. After all, even during the celebration in the DPRK of the 60 year anniversary of the end of the “hot phase” of the Korean War in July, 2013, Moscow decided to demonstrate its negative attitude toward North Korea's third nuclear test in February, 2013, as well as its “adventurous” behavior during the acute military and political crisis on the Korean Peninsula in March and April of the same year, and maintained only a modest Russian presence at this event. China, despite its own irritation for the same reasons, also sent the third highest ranking member in the PRC's hierarchy to Pyongyang during the aforementioned celebration, who was at the side of the DPRK's young leader, Kim Jong Un, throughout.

In this context, the North Koreans took unprecedented steps to demonstrate their intention to strengthen bilateral relations with Russia within the framework of the holiday events. The program of large scale athletic and artistic representations of “Arirang” began with a scene symbolizing friendship between our peoples, accompanied by a slogan announcing the “live” platform: “Korean–Russian friendship –From generation to generation”. Even more significant was the episode during the military parade, when (for the first time in history) the North Koreans acknowledged the participation of Soviet troops in the Korean War with gratitude. A large banner with the image of a Korean soldier, a Chinese volunteer, and a pilot with a Slavic appearance in a helmet in profile was driven along the stands on a truck. The caption under the banner read: “Thanks to all who fought together with us”.

It appears that this message was heard in Moscow. Since 2014, there has been a flurry of bilateral contacts at a high level. In January,

21) “Комментарий Департамента информации и печати МИД России в связи с проведением американско-южнокорейских военно-воздушных учений 10.04.2014.”
http://mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/newsline/79A59A2223279C4E44257CB60049BDB6 (May 7, 2014).

the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK (second in command of the state), Kim Yong-Nam, traveled to Russia to participate in the opening of the Olympic Games in Sochi and had conversations with Russian President V.V. Putin and Russia's other leaders. In March, Pyongyang was visited by president of Tatars tan, R.N Minnihanov, and Minister of Development for the Far East of the Russian Federation, A.S. Galushka. All these visits were very fruitful, and held in an unprecedentedly open and friendly atmosphere. At the end of April, the visit to Pyongyang was conducted from the Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, the Plenipotentiary Representative of the Russian Federation, and the President in the Far Eastern Federal District of the Russian Federation, Yu. P. Trutneva (the first such high level visit during last 30 years). The Russia-DPRK intergovernmental commission dealing with economy, trade and scientific cooperation sixth meeting in Vladivostok in June 2014 became one more important step on the way of bilateral collaboration development.

Russia has specific plans to actively expand its economic presence in North Korea. And this is one of the reasons for Moscow's genuine interest in reducing tensions on the peninsula, which it attempts to affect not only through words, but through deeds.

One of the vectors of intermediation efforts by Russia is the promotion of three major trilateral (RF-DPRK-ROK) infrastructure projects: unite the railroads in both Koreas with the Transiberian, construct gas pipelines and power lines from Primorye to South Korea through North Korea, in which Russia has already invested significant funds. Moscow is not inclined to underestimate the serious interest of Pyongyang in

broadening Russia's economic presence, including as a means for reducing its one-sided over-reliance on China. In this regard, Moscow also realizes that this "window of opportunity for Russian business will not be open forever, and may quickly "slam" in the event of a change in the foreign policy situation and the large scale arrival of major economic players such as the USA, Japan, ROK, and EU in North Korea. After all, there is considerable evidence that even now during a time of harsh economic sanctions imposed by the governments of the above-mentioned countries against Pyongyang, the representatives of their business communities are aggressively seeking and finding diverse opportunities to implement their business projects in North Korea.

For this reason, we are pleased to note that one of the successful efforts of the Russian Federation in this area took place in February, 2014 when a group of businessmen from South Korea visited, representatives from major companies: Hyundai, the steel giant Posco, and the railroad company Korail at the North Korean port of Rajin, where it successfully operates the Russian-North Korean joint venture "Rason KonTrans" has completed the construction of a modern railway from the Russia-DPRK border to this port and the reconstruction of one of its piers. It is noteworthy that this visit by Southerners to the North was conducted while the law adopted by the previous South Korean administration of President Lee Myung-bak that forbids any trade or economic collaboration with the North was in effect. Regarding this unprecedented trip by Southerners to the North, the Ministry of Unification of the ROK issued a special comment that this contact

did not represent a repeal of Lee Myung-bak's law, but simply an exception to it. Nevertheless, the meeting in Rajin was fruitful, and this line of inter-Korean cooperation has gained serious prospects for development.

In this connection, we must not forget the important and constructive role played by Russia in promoting a dialog between North and South Korea. This was demonstrated during the visit by Russian President V.V. Putin to the ROK in November, 2013, when a memorandum of intent was signed by the above-mentioned champions of South Korean businesses wishing to join the activities of the Russian-North Korean joint enterprise in Rajin aimed at transforming this point into a powerful intermodal transshipment hub, a "Rotterdam in Eastern Asia."²²⁾ This step, as we see, has continued and has good prospects for further development.

There is another area where Russia has been called to play an important role—the course for the revival of six-party negotiations on the nuclear issue in the Korean peninsula and the search for realistic solutions to existing challenges in this area. For the most pressing of these, read on.

As is well known, at this stage the DPRK decided to concentrate on the development of nuclear energy based on uranium enrichment and the use of light-water reactors. The construction of an experimental LWR is close to complete. In the opinion of domestic and western nuclear physicists, the qualifications of Korean specialists should allow them

to complete these projects. Nevertheless, there is the problem of the technical precision and nuclear safety of these facilities.

The Northerners build them solely on the basis of their own intellectual and scientific-technical base, fully isolated from the outside world, without any professional consultation or observation from abroad, i. e., essentially "reinventing the wheel". As a result, the compliance of the constructed nuclear facilities with international standards of safety, the requirements of which have been substantially increased after the tragedy in Fukushima, cannot help but be held in serious doubt.

The prospect of new nuclear power facilities appearing in close proximity to their own borders, facilities at which the parameters and standards of nuclear safety are completely unknown and the degree of safety is highly questionable, inevitably invokes understandable and serious concern, especially in the states neighboring the DPRK, including Russia.

This challenge presents Moscow with the necessity of generating ideas and initiating appropriate action for the purpose of reformatting and "repackaging" the current system of international sanctions on the DPRK's nuclear weapons program with the aim of achieving a resolution on cooperation of competent international organizations in the field of peaceful nuclear energy with this country. Similar precedents have been set in global practice. Pakistan, despite not being a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), successfully collaborated with the IAEA in the areas mentioned.

Russia is keenly interested in ensuring that the construction of a

22) "North Korea's Rajin as Rotterdam? A Little Less Crazy Now." *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb 10, 2014.

LWR in North Korea is done under international monitoring and in compliance with international norms of nuclear safety. It seems that despite all the legal and ideological complexity of solving this problem in the UN Security Council, common sense and similar concerns for their own safety may help Russia to find a common ground with the other neighbors of the DPRK: China, Japan, and the ROK.

Peter Hayes, of the Nautilus Institute, confirmed that the non-military nuclear potential of Pyongyang, namely this power facility, presents a real threat to regional security and demands the constructive attention of the international community.²³⁾

Russia's core interests, including the tasks of strengthening national security, especially in the Far East, require that Moscow continue its independent and active policy regarding the Korea issue, which raises the question about the integrity of the search for new unconventional solutions that would facilitate a change of mindset by the international community, primarily the prevailing alarmist stance taken by Washington, and its current passive policy on Korea from the point of view of diplomacy.

At present time Moscow enjoys mature multilateral comprehensive cooperation with Seoul. Suffice it to underline the achieved level of bilateral trade volume of \$ 32.5 billion, amount of South Korea investments

about \$ 2.6 billion in 2013 year and two countries citizens visa-free travel status.

As to Russia-ROK cooperation advancement prospect towards strategic partnership direction progress in the relations between Russia and Korea will largely depend on the countries' ability to realize what they expect from each other, how realistic the expectations are, and what reasons they have to regard each other as uniquely important partners.

In conclusion we would like to emphasize that our research outcomes confirm the realistic nature of Russia's Korean policy based on the principles of the independent and balanced approach towards both Seoul and Pyongyang happened to be quite successful and should be continued.

23) David F. von Hippel and Peter Hayes, "Illustrative Assessment of the Risk of Radiological Release from an Accident at the DPRK LWR at Yongbyon." *NAPSNet Policy Forum*, May 6, 2014, <http://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/illustrative-assessment-of-the-risk-of-radiological-release-from-an-accident-at-the-dprk-lwr-at-yongbyon-2/> (May 3, 2014); Peter Hayes, "Coping with North Korean Nuclear Quagmire- What Options are Available: Remarks at Jeju Forum Panel." May 30, 2013, <http://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/coping-with-north-korean-nuclear-quagmire-what-options-are-available-remarks-at-jeju-forum-panel/> (May 19, 2014).

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ABSTRACT

Russia's Policy towards the Korean Peninsula
at the close of XX
: beginning of XXI centuries

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Russia's pragmatic and calculating approach towards the Republic of Korea and the DPRK as well as towards the Korean Peninsula in general is an integral part of the strategic course and reflects its fundamental interests and constant goal during at least last 60 years.

Beginning from 1991 Moscow regards both Korean states as partners. Their relationships have independent value to Moscow and rest on principles of good neighborly interaction and cooperation.

Moscow enjoys mature multilateral comprehensive cooperation with Seoul. Suffice it to underline the achieved level of bilateral trade volume of \$ 32,5 billion, amount of South Korea investments about \$ 2,6 billion in 2013 and two countries citizens visa-free travel status.

Russia maintains a firm and genuine stand in favor of nuclear-free status of the Korean Peninsula and proceeds from understanding that the North Korean possession of nuclear weapons stands in fundamental contradiction to its national security interests as well as goals of sustaining the global nonproliferation regime.

At the same time, Russia's first priority is and will be the goal of maintaining peace, security, and stability on the Korean peninsula. Moscow believes that due to sharing a common border with North Korea, any Korean armed conflict will unavoidably inflict heavy damage to the military-and-political, economic, environmental, humanitarian, demographic, etc. security of Russia.

In this way, in a hypothetical situation whereupon Russian leadership was facing a dilemma whether to support military action against North Korea aimed at elimination of its nuclear weapons or act towards preserving peace on the Korean peninsula, Moscow will opt for the second path. In other words,

Russia is firmly committed to the nuclear disarmament of North Korea but exclusively by peaceful diplomatic means. Russia's approach towards the Korea reunification perspective can be described by the same characteristics -Moscow strongly support Korea people will and aspiration aimed at the unification but only on the peaceful and voluntary basis.

Keywords : the Korean peninsula, good neighborly relations, denuclearization, balanced course, peace and stability, strategic partnership

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