

2014
Vol. 25



JOINT U.S.-KOREA ACADEMIC STUDIES

ASIA'S SLIPPERY SLOPE: TRIANGULAR
TENSIONS, IDENTITY GAPS,
CONFLICTING REGIONALISM, AND
DIPLOMATIC IMPASSE TOWARD
NORTH KOREA

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ACADEMIC STUDIES

2014 | VOLUME 25

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SOUTH KOREA'S TRIANGULAR RELATIONS



Russia, China, and the Korean Peninsula

Valery Denisov and Alexander Lukin

Korea traditionally occupies an important place in Russia's foreign policy directed at Asia. That was the case at the turn of the twentieth century and in the Soviet period. In the first years after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia pursued a one-sided course oriented to the West; however, soon geopolitical and geo-economic realities obliged it to become active in Asia. This reorientation was tied both to global tendencies, above all the shift in the center of world politics and economics to the Asia-Pacific region, and to disappointment with the Western approach, characterized by a lack of understanding and hostility. These general tendencies were not slow to make an impact on Russia's approach to the Korean Peninsula. A course was chosen to forge normal partnership relations with both Korean governments. This occurred against the background of rapidly improving relations with China. Thus, from the outset in the second half of the 1990s, there was a triangular element to Russia's thinking on how to deal with the divided Korean Peninsula in the context of its Asian policies.

As Russia's relations with China were rapidly improving and its relations with the United States were deteriorating in the first decade of the twenty-first century, North Korea was seen through the lens of a triangle within a quadrangle within a hexagon. The quadrangle was the prism of U.S. pursuit of unipolarity, which was approaching the North Korean nuclear crisis in a manner that stood in the way of a political solution, and kept the triangle of Russia, China, and North Korea from pursuing a compromise plan that would lead to successful, multi-stage agreements combining assurances of regime security, assistance in support of economic development and reform, and denuclearization as well as a peace treaty. The hexagon included South Korea, which could be cooperative with Russia because of shared economic interests in a corridor through North Korea, and Japan, which generally was seen as siding with the United States and having a major role only at a later stage of negotiations. Blaming the U.S. hardline policy no less than North Korean suspicions for stalling the negotiations, Russia rested its hopes primarily on its relations with North Korea and China.

Assessments of the triangle with China and North Korea posed a problem, given the general atmosphere of not officially criticizing either of these countries. While there are alternative viewpoints publicly expressed in Russia, the mainstream, including many with official or semi-official positions, is careful not to deviate much from this advisory. Two prevailing arguments followed: 1) North Korea is not interested in the possession of nuclear weapons except as a pressure tactic to achieve reasonable goals, primarily from the United States and its allies; and 2) China shares Russia's thinking in the Six-Party Talks framework, and the two countries can work closely together for mutual benefit. The problem with these assumptions is that the DPRK's behavior defied Russian expectations at various points as it more clearly supported development indicative of a desire to be a nuclear weapons state with supportive missile capacity, and Russians often suspected China of opposition to reunification of the peninsula and aspirations to put North Korea under its own domination. The two other states in Russia's primary triangle were driving forces in the struggle over how to handle the nuclear crisis, while Russia was often relegated to a reactive role.

This chapter emphasizes the Russian side of the triangle. It argues that policy under President Vladimir Putin has been pragmatic, puts priority on the Korean Peninsula, and—since the breakdown in the Six-Party Talks—has been struggling to find balance that will achieve denuclearization as well as other objectives. This struggle is linked to Russia's bilateral relations with both the DPRK and South Korea as well as to its challenges in coordination

with China. Much of the chapter concerns the relations of China with both the DPRK and South Korea and its handling of inter-Korean ties, as seen in Russia. In 2013-14 the increasing seriousness of the situation is prompting new assessments in Russia, which are discussed as well in the concluding section.

THE LEADERSHIP COURSE OF VLADIMIR PUTIN

The pragmatic foreign policy course under the leadership of Vladimir Putin is free of ideology, both communism and early Yeltsin Westernism, and is directed at forming around Russia an independent center of power, which foresees the establishment of normal partnership relations with all countries, above all Russia's neighbors. This is necessary both for the development of economic relations, which are directed at strengthening the economic power of Russia, and at world recognition of Moscow as an important foreign policy player. From this point of view, Asian neighbors are doubly important, since apart from the usual significance, they make possible the diversification of Russian foreign policy activity, which previously had given too much weight to the West. Moreover, in the East its political and economic model meets with much more understanding than in the West. The same applies to the reception given to the shift in Russia's outlook on North Korea, which was met with enthusiasm in China from the start of Putin's presidency, but with U.S. concern.

The Korean Peninsula is important from several perspectives. First, Russia is interested in the security of its borders, consequently in the political stability of both Korean states. Any war or loss of control in developments on the peninsula, in consideration of the presence in North Korea of nuclear weapons, could easily directly affect the adjoining Russian territory, capable of causing casualties, an ecological catastrophe, a flood of refugees, and other dangerous consequences. As a neighbor of North Korea, China expresses these same concerns. Second, both Koreas are economic partners of Russia, with South Korea Russia's third trading partner in Asia after China and Japan and an important investor in the Russian economy. Such cooperation plays an especially big role for the Russian Far East, the development of which is an important strategic issue for Moscow. It is significant too that ties with it serve as a useful balance for what many consider to be one-sided dependency on China. Trade with the DPRK is not large, but, after all, it is a neighboring country. Besides, realization of a whole range of large-scale trans-Korean projects are tied to its participation or, at least, consent. These two factors account for a third: Russian interest in a quick resolution of the nuclear problem of the DPRK. For this, it actively cooperates with all of the partners in the Six-Party Talks. Thus, for very pragmatic reasons, Russia is interested in peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, through cooperation with both Korean governments.

Since the breakdown of the Six-Party Talks in 2008 there has often been tension on how to strike a balance between pressuring North Korea toward denuclearization and restarting the talks on terms that leave the path to denuclearization less clear. China has urged unconditional resumption of the talks, while the United States and South Korea have put conditions on any resumption, as Secretary of Defense Robert Gates explained, having grown "tired of buying the same horse twice."¹ Russia backs the Chinese position. It is more optimistic that progress can be made in this fashion, compared to U.S., South Korea, or Japanese officials. This results in triangular relations whereby Seoul encourages

Moscow to be more demanding on Pyongyang, while Beijing prefers to follow its own logic with a priority on preventing instability in North Korea. Moscow also worries about instability there, agreeing with Beijing.

RUSSIA AND THE DPRK

Russian authorities well understand the character of the North Korean regime. Indeed, the majority of people who find themselves in power in Russia recall the USSR of the Brezhnev period, which reminds them of communist North Korea, albeit distinguished by a softer regime. At the same time, a debate is under way in Russia's ruling elite about what policy is needed toward Pyongyang. Holding quite a strong position in this are the heirs to communist ideology and approaches of the Cold War era, who continue to view world processes as a battle with the United States on all fronts. In their opinion, any anti-American force, even more, a radical one such as the Pyongyang regime, is a valuable partner. Although such an approach is usually not articulated in official documents, supporters can influence concrete decisions. A second group concentrated around allies of former Acting Prime Minister Egor Gaidar, on the contrary, starts from its western ideology, viewing North Korea with extreme skepticism. However, decisions taken toward the peninsula, as a rule, are based on the pragmatic course described above. This breakdown into three approaches with one deemed pragmatic and the others seen as extreme is similar to the way Chinese describe their calculus, also suggesting that policies in the West are ideological and not pragmatic, while their approach is not extreme support for North Korea.

In Russia the starting point is that in the present circumstances the DPRK scarcely has any chance to escape from its deep economic crisis, which is increasingly of a systematic character. The ruling regime is incapable of reforming the economy of the country, fearing loss of control over the situation and, with it, loss of authority. At the same time, despite the depth of the crisis, spontaneous collapse of the regime in the near future is hardly possible. From all appearances, the young Kim Jong-un has succeeded in strengthening his authority. Moreover, China would hardly allow the collapse of the DPRK. It is deeply drawn into the problems of North Korea and concerned about them and will continue to do everything possible to keep future developments under control and satisfy China's interests there and on the peninsula as a whole. Awareness of China's stance informs Russia's approach to the DPRK too.

Improved relations with Pyongyang were one expression of the overall evolution of Russian foreign policy to a less one-sided and more pragmatic course. Russia strives to sustain good neighbor relations with the DPRK, maintaining political dialogue through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Over the past ten years the two sides have signed more than 40 inter-governmental and inter-agency agreements. The 2000 treaty replaced that of 1961, removing the mutual defense requirement, formally ending the alliance and the role of a shared ideology in favor of the principles of international law. Trade is at an insignificant \$100-150 million per year, reflecting North Korea's difficulty in supplying traditional exports and delays in payment or absence of any payment for goods received.

These factors make it impossible to realize much-advertised triangular projects with South Korea—a gas pipeline, a railroad corridor, and electric transmission lines—, agreement to

which was reached in Kim Jong-il's August 2011 visit to Russia. Yet, two projects have recently been realized: the September 2003 construction of a 54 km. railway segment connecting the ice-free Korean port of Rajin with the Russian border city of Khasan at a cost of 5.5 billion rubles; and modernization of the Rajin terminal at a cost of 3.5 billion rubles. A big step forward was the September 2012 signing of an agreement on North Korea's \$11 billion debt.

The DPRK's missile and nuclear actions have had a negative influence on bilateral relations. Moscow has continuously stood for a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula, does not accept the DPRK's nuclear status, and participates in international sanctions that were imposed by the Security Council. On December 2, 2013 a presidential order was signed on fulfilling Security Council resolution 2094, providing the legal basis for implementation of this response to the February 2013 nuclear test in violation of Security Council resolutions. It was tied to the need to stop the DPRK's nuclear and missile programs, but it did not touch the essential needs of the population of that country. Fulfilling its international responsibilities, Moscow did everything possible to soften Pyongyang's reaction and not harm its economic interests. Testifying to this is the fact that the order was not written until almost a year after the Security Council resolution. Moreover, an official pronouncement for the media stressed that Russia's sanctions do not extend to Russians who support ties with North Korean partners in finance, trade, and science and culture, areas not connected to nuclear and missile activities of the DPRK. It was mentioned also that in case Pyongyang met the demands on all of its missile and nuclear programs and returned to the non-proliferation treaty regime and subscribed to the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty, the sanctions would be dropped, opening the possibility for development of trade, investment, and other international ties.²

Russia remains convinced that a resolution of the North Korean nuclear program must be found strictly through political-diplomatic means, through restoration of the Six-Party Talks. Moscow is interested in having in the DPRK a good, reliable, and predictable neighbor, to develop multi-sided relations with it built on the principles of international law, no interference in internal affairs, mutual respect, equality, and mutual benefit. It seeks to prod the DPRK into rational policies, notably cooperation with the ROK. Precisely for this reason Moscow officially welcomed the reopening of the Kaeseong industrial complex in August 2013 and expressed the hope that on the basis of this experience constructive dialogue would ensue on other problems, thus reducing tension, strengthening security, and forging an atmosphere of trust and cooperation on the Korean Peninsula.³ At the same time, in relations with Pyongyang, Moscow often feels dissatisfied with attempts to deceive its partner and pursue objectives incompatible with recognized international norms, which at times are characteristic of DPRK policies.

RUSSIA AND SOUTH KOREA

Political and economic relations between Moscow and Seoul are developing stably today. This is facilitated by mutual economic interests: South Korea's in resources, and Russia's in investment, but also from the geopolitical situation, complicated relations between Seoul and Tokyo and the strengthening of China. Periodically, the heads of government exchange visits. Trade and investment cooperation has grown markedly in recent years; however, as

before, Russian exports are mainly natural resources, and the ROK's are finished goods. Change in the structure of Russian exports is proceeding very slowly, and this is not satisfactory to the Russian side. Investment cooperation is picking up in tempo, especially in the extraction of oil and gas but also in the assembly of automobiles. South Korean car companies annually supply more than 200,000 vehicles, including those assembled on Russian territory.

After Park Geun-hye took office, there have been two summits, one in the context of the G-20 in St. Petersburg in September and the other in Korea in November, when President Putin achieved agreement on an entire array of bilateral cooperation. The eight signed documents included: removing visa requirements, establishing cultural centers, forming an investment platform, cooperating in the establishment in Russia of a center for shipbuilding, and cooperating in the area of transportation. Trade has reached about \$25 billion, cumulative investment in the Russian economy has hit \$2.5 billion, although it is not increasing rapidly, and the summit joint declaration specified concrete measures for strengthening cooperation in technology too.

A lot of attention in the Park-Putin talks was given to the situation on the Korean Peninsula. Moscow and Seoul firmly declared the unacceptability of the DPRK acquiring rocket and nuclear capabilities. It was strongly underlined that North Korea cannot acquire the status of a nuclear weapons state. The two sides were united that the DPRK must fulfill its international obligations and promises to denuclearize as well as Security Council resolutions and Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks. Moscow and Seoul declared their support for the resumption of this negotiating process for managing the nuclear problem on the Korean Peninsula. The memorandum of understanding signed during the summit called for steel giant POSCO, Hyundai Merchant Marine Co., and Korea Railroad Corp. to participate in the Rajin-Khasan development project.

Speaking at a press conference in January 2014, Park Geun-hye assessed the current level of South Korean-Russian relations. "In relations with Russia until now, there were various problems, she noted, answering a journalist's question on designated events. However, in the course of two summits we have been able to resolve many problems and draw closer."⁴ On January 1 an agreement on visa-free entry for a period of up to sixty days went into effect.

RUSSIA'S APPROACH TO THE WMD CRISIS AND KOREAN CONTINGENCIES

Russia has always supported and will continue to support the non-nuclear status of the Korean Peninsula and the non-proliferation of WMD and the means to acquire them in this region. It actively works for and will continue to work for a political resolution of the nuclear crisis on the peninsula. It condemned both the rocket and nuclear ambitions of the DPRK, taking a principled stance on these questions, as in the rocket launch in June 2006 and the nuclear test in October of that year. Russia directly participated in preparing Security Council (rocket and nuclear) resolutions 1695 and 1718, which not only called on the DPRK to halt these programs, but also contained concrete measures for curbing its military potential, specified by means of political management of complex problems on the Korean Peninsula.

Pyongyang's announcement of its intention to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty came as a surprise. The official statement of the Russian Foreign Ministry issued on January 10, 2003 expressed deep concern.

The Russian approach to the crisis over North Korean WMD should be seen against the general background of Moscow's vision of the situation on the Korean Peninsula and of the non-proliferation issue in general. The proliferation of nuclear weapons is extremely damaging for the world as a whole, and it is at odds with Russian national interests to a greater degree than the interests of other major powers. Russia is the only state in the world that has the possibility of conducting a retaliatory nuclear strike against the United States. In this respect, it is one of the two most powerful countries in the world. Thus, proliferation devalues its military power and, consequently, its influence in the world. For Washington, for instance, proliferation is not so critical, since it is first in other respects. In the case of Russia, this is the only factor that puts it on a level with the United States above other countries. As a permanent member of the Security Council, it is one of five (although important), but not one of two. In today's circumstances, when all other indicators show Russia far behind not only the United States but many other countries, proliferation, especially near Russia's borders, is not only dangerous, it undermines Russia's influence in the world.

Russia has participated actively in the Six-Party Talks since 2003. In order to find an approach for resolving the nuclear problem on the peninsula, it actively cooperates with China. The two began right away to seek a peaceful resolution of the problem. In a joint communiqué of February 27, 2003, the foreign ministers of the two countries expressed deep concern over the situation on the peninsula.⁵ The Korean question was given a substantial place in the joint declaration during the visit of Hu Jintao on May 26-28, 2003.⁶ Subsequently, the two sides continued close cooperation and consultations on this issue. They jointly called for the continuation of the Six-Party Talks in periods when they had ceased and for peaceful resolution of the nuclear problem by diplomatic means. At present, several times a year Igor Morgulov and Wu Dawei discuss this matter.

Moscow has all sorts of reasons to feel deeply dissatisfied with Pyongyang's actions on the nuclear issue, which, from Moscow's point of view, undermine regional security, and create multiple problems. Russia and the DPRK, having restored cooperative relations at the end of the 20th century and signed a series of important political and legal documents, expressed their firm intention to make an active effort on behalf of security and stability around the world. If there is danger of aggression toward either of them or in a situation of a threat to peace and security or also in case of a need for consultations and joint action, Russia and the DPRK expressed readiness without delay to contact each other. This key position of the Pyongyang Declaration has actually been ignored by the North Korean side, which started on the path of escalating the rocket and nuclear crisis, leading to the anti-North Korean resolutions 1695 and 1718. Despite the fact that shortly afterwards there was success in reaching compromise agreements in the context of the Six-Party Talks, questions remain about Pyongyang's observance of the obligations it took upon itself in these joint documents. From Russia's point of view, it is necessary, above all, to verify North Korea's nuclear sites. This requires restoring official relations between the DPRK and the IAEA and conducting inspections of the sites on the basis of existing norms and rules.

For objectivity, it is necessary to acknowledge that the nuclear problem on the peninsula has been aroused not only by DPRK. There were also attempts by South Korea to develop its nuclear potential. In the 1970s the government of Park Chung-hee was on the verge of building an atomic bomb, and only the sharp U.S. reaction forced it to set aside this ambition, but it did not stop attempts to engage in related non-peaceful activities. It is known that in 1982 and 2000 the ROK was conducting secret work on the enrichment of uranium, about which it had to “confess” and inform the IAEA. Although this fact did not lead to a wide-ranging anti-South Korean reaction in the international community, it was a signal that the IAEA had to watch the nuclear activities of Seoul closely too. Experts consider it to have contemporary nuclear technology (about 20 nuclear reactors), putting it on the list of states (more than 30 in all) that the IAEA views as able to build nuclear weapons. In this light, Russia seeks an active role in pursuit of an all-around, diplomatic resolution of the Korean nuclear crisis, turning the peninsula into a zone free of WMD.

Starting from what has been said above, we can specify some characteristics of future Russian policies toward the Korean Peninsula. Russia will continue to try to develop equal relations with both Korean governments on the basis of principles of international law. It will avoid dilatory or hasty changes in policy. Considering the economic situation in the North and the unpredictability of the regime, Russia will accelerate development of economic cooperation with the South. It will exert itself on behalf of disarmament steps, including the withdrawal of armed forces by both sides from areas bordering the DMZ under strict international control. While developing mutually beneficial economic ties with the DPRK, it will strive to establish a mechanism for the inflow of South Korean investment into the Russian economy and take steps for the entrance of Russian business into the high-tech sectors of the South Korean economy, as it also pursues three-sided cooperation in rail transportation linking trans-Korean and Trans-Siberian lines and in other sectors.

Future Russian policy will depend heavily on the overall atmosphere in international relations and especially on relations with the United States. If relations with Washington develop, Moscow can take a more active position, e.g. in urging China to exert greater pressure on the DPRK. In case of deterioration in Russo-U.S. relations, Russia will stick to the prior line of weakening sanctions and verbal exhortations to the North Korean regime. A separate question is Russian behavior in case of sudden destabilization of the situation in the DPRK, connected to the death of the leader and a struggle for power. Here Moscow’s actions would be directed, above all, at reducing the danger of any military conflict, nuclear accident, or uncontrolled exodus of migrants onto its territory. In that situation, it would be ready to cooperate with other DPRK neighbors, above all, the PRC and South Korea, in search of some way to bring the situation under control.

CHINA AND THE KOREAN PENINSULA

In Beijing’s policy toward the Korean Peninsula we can distinguish both overlapping approaches to the DPRK and ROK and specific types of conduct toward each. The main difference in these approaches is that North Korea is an important military and political ally of the PRC in Asia, and South Korea belongs to an opposing camp as a strategic ally of the United States. This distinction, however, is somewhat neutralized by Beijing’s line of

a balanced policy to develop relations with both Koreas. Its approach, which has the most influence on Pyongyang, differs from Moscow's approach. If in Russia only a minority of the elite sympathize with the North's leadership and consider it necessary to maintain it in power, in China there are much more complex feelings about this. On the one hand, one finds great dissatisfaction with Pyongyang's course in developing nuclear weapons, considering their proliferation and possession by such an unpredictable regime unacceptable. On the character of the regime there are also no special illusions. Chinese experts close to ruling circles openly call it "feudal," "dictatorial," "medieval," etc. at international conferences. At the same time, across a wide spectrum of Chinese society, in ruling circles, and especially in the armed forces, there are powerful historical feelings about the North Korean "communist brothers." Relations between the two regimes have a long history, colored by many patriotic myths. China saved the North Korean regime in 1953, sacrificing thousands of "volunteers," whose exploits are remembered in monuments found in many Chinese cities. Still alive and having influence are people who were participants in the war with the South, and scattered across all of North China are memorials to the heroes of that war. For the leadership now to follow a course of complete isolation of North Korea would be to recognize the complete failure and thoughtlessness of its entire policy toward the peninsula, beginning with the formation of the PRC and that thousands of heroes of the Korean War died in vain. This is very hard psychologically and politically.

There is other geopolitical thinking in China, including those who regard the reunification of Korea as inevitable and interference in this process as mindless, citing the need to develop relations with the South and making the most of the unfolding situation. Yet, another point of view is also influential, supporting the opinion that a unified, strong, democratic Korea, in which the United States maintains considerable influence, does not correspond to China's interests since it could become a serious competitor and unfavorably impact on the internal situation in the PRC.

In recent decades China has done a lot to prevent destabilization of the situation in North Korea, which encountered great difficulty (the death of Kim Il-sung; U.S., Japanese, South Korean, and other military, political, and economic pressure; international sanctions, the death of Kim Jong-il). The persistent economic crisis remains a serious destabilizing factor. The (*songun* or military first) line from 1995 is costly, in 2011 comprising about 20 percent of the GDP or \$7.6 billion, and intensification of indoctrination with the ideas of "juche" has driven the country into a dead end. Attempts at quasi-reforms have failed. The ruling elite dares not go close to the edge of economic transformation, recognizing the danger that it would lose power.

The death of Kim Jong-il, a leader who had caused a lot of grief to his ally, was taken quietly in Beijing. The Chinese leadership on the surface reacted positively to Kim's decision to make his young son Kim Jong-un the heir to his power, and even prior to his father's death the son was invited to visit China. The change in party leadership after the 18th Party Congress and later in government positions had little effect on Beijing's support for a leader, who in conditions of international isolation had to listen to Beijing's advice. Under the yoke of severe international sanctions, Pyongyang is widening its economic ties with the PRC, which provides substantial help in energy and foodstuffs. Trade rose from \$3.5 to \$5.6 billion from 2010 to 2011, when they signed a new agreement on economic and technological cooperation.

Chinese business was planting the seeds of its presence in the North Korean economy. Joint management was established on two islands rented by China on the Yalu River and in the Rason trade zone, enclaves until recently run by Jang Song-taek. China invested about \$400 million in developing the zone at Rason, where more than 60 of its firms operated and to which a railway spur from Hunchun was being extended. It declared its readiness to supply to the DPRK credits of more than \$10 billion for developing infrastructure and extracting coal, iron ore, and other mineral deposits. Realization of large projects is scarcely possible, given Security Council sanctions; however, in the opinion of experts, China intentionally “does not notice” Pyongyang’s violations of the sanctions regime, and it is not distinguished by its strict observance of the Security Council resolutions.

China provides substantial humanitarian assistance each year, and unlike the West, does not require monitoring its distribution. Military cooperation also is developing with the DPRK, closed from public purview with both sides limiting official announcements on contacts that occur under an agreement on military and technical cooperation. In light of sanctions, both sides prefer not to advertise their cooperation. The DPRK has a substantial debt of more than \$5 billion, which it hopes will some day be forgiven.

The abrupt removal of Jang Song-taek from the political arena at the end of 2013 raised concern in China. On the one hand, even for the DPRK, it is extraordinary in recent years for one of the highest leaders to be executed, and it is evidence of political instability in a neighbor and ally. On the other, removal of a person with good ties to Beijing along with official charges that he was working on behalf of “another state” (clearly hinting at China) was a blow. At least Chinese were accustomed to working with him. Yet, official responses were restrained, characterizing the matter as “the DPRK’s internal affair” as hope was expressed “to see the DPRK maintain political stability and realize economic development and people there lead a happy life...We hope and believe that China-DPRK economic cooperation and trade will move ahead in a sound and steady manner,” added the foreign ministry spokesmen.⁷ Given the complex military and political situation on the peninsula and the dead end on the nuclear question, Beijing remains careful and vigilant.

Of late, economic ties have acquired more significance in Sino-North Korean relations. Overcoming many obstacles, Chinese business is extending its presence in the Rason economic zone, establishing more than 100 joint ventures with more than 150 Chinese companies working there. Chinese have rented on a long-term lease two wharves at the port of Rajin, and China has a triangular project with the ROK to build a railroad and highway across the entire span of the DPRK, intended to compete with Russia’s triangular project linking the railroad of the ROK and DPRK with Russia’s. Despite its dissatisfaction with the behavior of its strategic ally, China has no intention of altering its fundamental approach, as before regarding it as an important geopolitical factor in its opposition to the United States, whose policies, from China’s point of view are directed against the expansion of China’s influence on the Korean Peninsula and in all of Northeast Asia.

The international isolation into which the United States and its allies drive Pyongyang leave it with no other options besides drawing closer politically and economically to China. As an ally, China can help in overcoming an economic crisis, offering more massive assistance, but Beijing refrains from that as it strives to persuade Pyongyang to start on the path of reform.

“North Korean refugees” in China pose a serious problem, as seen in the recent transfer of more than 30 of them to the DPRK, complicating relations with Seoul, which demands that they be sent to South Korea. An agreement exists with the DPRK whereby each side returns to the other anyone who illegally crossed their border. This is an unwelcome problem, which China promises to solve on the basis of “domestic law and international rights, and in the spirit of humanism.”⁸ Any solution is likely to reflect China’s overall goals: to maintain the stability of the North Korean regime, to strengthen influence over its new leader, to prod him into economic reform to end the deep crisis, and not to allow dangerous exacerbation of the situation on the peninsula.

CHINA AND SOUTH KOREA

China’s policy toward South Korea is well thought out, without leading to the rupture in relations that occurred with Soviet-South Korean normalization. On the whole, it has succeeded in maintaining balanced political relations with both sides, while boosting cooperation with Seoul to a massive scale, climbing to more than \$250 billion in trade and securing 70 percent of the foreign investment by the ROK. The goal is \$300 billion in trade in 2015, as the two sides negotiate the conclusion of an FTA. The rise in economic cooperation is accompanied by cultural influence on both sides. China’s Korea policy is seen with rising concern by a certain part of South Korea’s ruling elite, fearing hegemonism. Seoul has not concealed its disappointment over China’s support for North Korea’s position on the sinking of the Cheonan and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island. In turn, Beijing reacts with growing concern to the intensified ROK-US military-political alliance aimed at the United States incorporating South Korea into a global anti-missile defense. It expressed dissatisfaction with their October 12 agreement on missiles, which gave Seoul the right to extend the range of its rockets from 300 to 800 km.

In the ROK the Koguryo issue drew a sharp reaction. Seoul called the PRC claim that this ancient state was part of China “historical terrorism,” and the public condemned as rewriting history China’s conception of Koguryo as its “regional vassal.” On the South Korean side, scholars “remember” Manchuria in this period belonging to the Korean state, while regarding, as do North Koreans, its territory as the “historical lands of Korea.” Recently a new thorn in bilateral relations is the underground Iedo (Suyan) rock (island), over which Beijing intends to extend its rights, listing it as an object for regular patrols by ship and plane. When China in late 2013 declared its air defense identification zone, Seoul officially protested and declared that it would not recognize the zone. In turn, Beijing is critical about Seoul’s plans to establish a research station in the Yellow Sea on reefs where the exclusive economic zones cross with implications for claims in future negotiations. One more complicating factor is illegal fishing in the ROK economic zone, as in 2011 when the Korean coast guard caught Chinese in the act and one of their officers was killed, resonating in anti-Chinese emotions. Subsequent negotiations to prevent a similar incident did not stop the ROK from strictly controlling such illegal fishing. Uneasiness also occurred over Beijing’s attempt to appropriate the song “Arirang” and other Korean cultural symbols and traditions.

Despite such disturbing elements, China in the foreseeable future will persist in its course of strengthening all-around ties with South Korea, striving to reduce the influence of the

United States and Japan and defend its interests on the southern part of the peninsula. China's significance for South Korean foreign policy noticeably rose after Park Geun-hye became president, as hopes persist for China's help in resolving the nuclear crisis, reestablishing inter-Korean dialogue, and, in the final analysis, reunification. Park's June 2013 visit to Beijing confirmed her vision of relations. This summit showed the intention of both sides to improve strategic cooperation, but standing in the way of such cooperation is the U.S.-ROK alliance.

BEIJING AND INTER-KOREAN RELATIONS

Officially, Beijing supports and does all it can for improving DPRK-ROK relations. They found hope in the "golden decade" of 1998-2008 when relations developed very well in many spheres when Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun were in office. Bilateral trade rose, large-scale economic projects were realized, humanitarian contacts were actively cultivated, and both sides entered into negotiations for reducing military tension on the peninsula. When Lee Myung-bak came to power at the head of the conservative political establishment relations were thrown back to a time of sharp military-political opposition, even to the threshold of military conflict in 2010. Thanks to the efforts of Russia and China the two Korean sides succeeded in averting this danger. Inter-Korean relations are now complex. In 2011 the ROK conducted more than 40 military maneuvers, some involving American forces. At the beginning of 2012 the two undertook new maneuvers in South Korea. All of this aroused Pyongyang, leading in March to an especially intense propaganda war as the two allies proceeded with operation Key Resolve. Many meetings and demonstrations organized in the DPRK called for the "start of a holy war against the traitorous regime of Lee Myung-bak." North Korea continues insistently to seek a South Korean apology for not expressing condolences at the death of Kim Jong-il, making also the following demands:

1. Fulfill the agreements in the joint summit declarations of June 15, 2000 and October 4, 2007
2. Stop accusing the DPRK of participating in the sinking of the Cheonan and shelling of Yeonpyeong
3. Stop military maneuvers aimed against the DPRK
4. Begin practical work for the denuclearization of the peninsula
5. Stop the psychological warfare against the DPRK
6. Restore inter-Korean cooperation and exchanges
7. Accept North Korean proposals to replace the 1953 armistice with a new peace mechanism
8. Abrogate the 1948 national security law and other laws, "directed against the Korean nation and unification of the country"

Pyongyang refused attempts to launch dialogues with the Lee Myung-bak administration and hoped that in the April 2012 parliamentary elections and the December presidential elections forces would come to power with which it would succeed in restoring political dialogue and broadening economic ties—forces standing for resumption of the course of

inter-Korean cooperation of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, which had given birth to hopes in both North and South Korea for reunification. China supports the idea of peaceful unification of Korea through a gradual process, during which attention should concentrate on strengthening security and stability on the peninsula, finding a political resolution of the nuclear crisis, developing dialogue beginning in inter-Korean relations, and realizing various forms of cooperation and exchanges.

Verbally supporting the unity of Korea, Beijing, nonetheless, would never agree to the presence in a unified Korea of foreign military bases and troops. A remark by Kim Dae-jung during his presidency about that possibility was taken extremely negatively by the Chinese. Beijing also fears that further delay in resolving the nuclear problem will provoke a regional arms race, leading to the emergence in Northeast Asia of new nuclear powers (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan). Chinese are actively pressing for the resumption of the Six-Party Talks, taking various initiatives to reanimate the negotiating process (Wu Dawei's three-stage plan calls for productive inter-Korean dialogue, then negotiations between the DPRK and the United States, and last, full-fledged Six-Party Talks).

Beijing condemned the DPRK nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009, participating actively in the Security Council resolutions that imposed strict sanctions on it. Beijing put pressure on Kim Jong-il, introducing economic restrictions, succeeding in stopping the nuclear weapons program and fulfilling the Joint Statement of Sept. 19, 2005. Despite its general assurances about readiness to return to the Six-Party Talks without conditions, Pyongyang prefers to reach an agreement on the nuclear problem with the United States. China welcomed the February 2012 North Korea-U.S. agreement reached in Beijing for a moratorium on nuclear tests and long-distance rocket launches and to halt the enrichment of uranium and agree to IAEA inspections of nuclear objects. It also approved of the two agreeing to fulfill the obligations set forth by the Six-Party Talks in the Joint Statement. In mid-April Pyongyang's declaration of its launch of a satellite in honor of the centenary of the birth Kim Il-sung drew a sharp negative reaction from the world community. While China did not support this action, it was put in an awkward position and called on Seoul "to preserve peace and show restraint." Plans by Pyongyang to launch missiles were condemned in December as well, by the Russian Foreign Ministry, which appealed on December 3 for it to stop, and on the next day by China, which indicated that it has constantly recommended to Pyongyang not to arouse the world community with such launches, but its opinion has yet to be accepted. When the launch occurred on December 12, the response from Beijing was negative, but less severe than at the time of prior launches.

In February 2013 Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi "firmly" condemned the DPRK's new nuclear test. Tension in bilateral relations led to some incidents of the seizure of Chinese fishing boats by the North Korean coast guard. A strange situation arose: repeatedly recommending that its ally observe the UN sanctions and repeatedly being rebuffed, China "loses face," but it does not adopt more decisive measures. Why? It is not a matter of not being in a position to exert effective pressure, since 90 percent of the DPRK energy and 40-45 percent of DPRK foodstuffs depend on China. Rather, China has not decided and is hardly likely to decide on such sanctions. On the one hand, it is dissatisfied that Pyongyang creates problems for countries in the region and the whole world. Therefore, China joins in UN sanctions and

often expresses its dissatisfaction with the DPRK's actions. On the other hand, we should not forget that the DPRK is the only official ally of the PRC, sealed in a treaty of 1961 obliging each side to respond quickly with military and all other possible means of assistance in the event of an armed attack on the other. This is the only treaty of mutual defense that China has with another country.

A refusal to support the DPRK would signify recognition that the heroes of the war, whose example is taught to schoolchildren, fell in vain. Moreover, for Chinese communists it would be equivalent to wiping away the country's entire foreign policy practically from the formation of the PRC, dealing a serious blow to the PRC's legitimacy. No less important are geopolitical considerations. A majority of official Chinese analysts consider that the main problem with the foreign policy of the country is U.S. attempts to contain its development, for which it organizes along China's entire perimeter a military-political encirclement. In this situation, even a sometimes disobedient, allied DPRK is a useful geopolitical resource. Excessive pressure on it could lead to its economic collapse, bringing a flood of refugees, political instability, etc. Moreover, unification of the two Koreas, which could result from such a collapse, would allow American influence to grow stronger in a new, more powerful state.

For these reasons Beijing strives to apply moderate pressure on Pyongyang, nudging it to a more rational foreign policy and more decisive internal reforms; however, this course scarcely leads to real results. Any serious market reforms would result in more openness, which would lead the people to understand the real situation in the country, bringing about the regime's collapse and reunification. Therefore, Pyongyang is hardly likely to take that path, preferring to continue with a policy of trading threats for assistance.

However the problem of rockets and nuclear weapons unfolds, in our opinion, in the DPRK there is still a chance for managing the situation politically. Beijing continues to support the DPRK, which is an important strategic bastion in its battle with the United States for influence in Northeast Asia, including the Korean Peninsula. In China it is well understood that if there is not out of the ordinary, uncontrolled collapse of the regime, any resolution of the Korean problem, due to its complexity, will require more than one decade. To achieve a comprehensive solution, which assumes above all political resolution of the nuclear crisis, conclusion of a peace treaty in place of the armistice, establishment of constructive relations between the two states on the peninsula, creation of conditions for peaceful coexistence of the DPRK and ROK—all of this is possible under conditions of maintaining the status quo. China's Korean policy is based precisely on this, and will be based in the foreseeable future. Chinese are convinced that normalization of inter-Korean relations and a long period of peaceful coexistence can open the way for a gradual advance to unification of the Korean Peninsula.

CONCLUSION

The approach of Russia and China to the problems of the Korean Peninsula will be determined, even in the long term, by triangular relations with Moscow and Beijing. These very relations are quite strong both due to mutual economic dependence and, to a great degree, to geopolitical reasons. The general state of international relations, especially the rise in tension in Europe, contributes to Moscow and Beijing drawing closer and their joint inclination to contain attempts at world domination by the United States and the West. In connection with this, in the

context of quadrangular relations of Russia-China-DPRK-USA, the tendency is increasing to counteract the attempts by the United States and its allies to liquidate or weaken the North Korean regime with the possibility of more intensive support for the DPRK. Although the DPRK is unpredictable, it is an ally in the overall geopolitical struggle.

The first signs of the softening of the position of Russia regarding the DPRK's military adventurism already are present. The Russian Foreign Ministry did not condemn Pyongyang for its launch of a medium-range rocket of the Nodong class in March 2014. The Information Department only called for "all interested sides to use restraint from actions that could lead to aggravation of the situation on the Korean Peninsula."⁹ Later in March, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia actually laid the blame for the artillery exchange between the two Koreas on Seoul and its allies, accusing them of provoking the North by means of conducting large-scale military exercises.¹⁰

Without doubt, such a change of position was a direct result of the sharp reaction of the West to the reunification of Crimea with Russia. Moscow also in this way expressed its gratitude to Pyongyang for Pyongyang's support for its position during the voting on the question of the legitimacy of the referendum in Crimea at the UN General Assembly, where the DPRK wound up being among only 11 countries that voted against the anti-Russian resolution. Seeking not to be isolated, Russia is striving to strengthen relations with critics of the West in other parts of the world.

It is hard to believe that such changes could proceed without consideration of the position of Russia's strategic partner—the PRC. In contrast to the West, the reaction of Beijing to the hostility to Russia over Ukraine was taken, on the whole, as approval of Russia. China did not support the West in Ukraine since it sees the crisis as engineered by the West aiming at world domination. In countering this tendency, in China's view, Russia is a valuable ally. A commentary by Xinhua news agency on March 7 entitled "The West's Fiasco in Ukraine" was very sympathetic to Russia's actions and critical of those of the West: "Russia may no longer be interested in competing for global preeminence with the West, but when it comes to cleaning up a mess the West created in the country's backyard, Russian leaders once again proved their credibility and shrewdness in planning and executing effective counter moves."¹¹ In short, Beijing is happy that someone was brave and resolute enough to take effective measures against Western "hegemonism." But it is also comfortable that this was not China, and the Ukrainian crisis would not worsen Sino-U.S. relations that China values. It would also divert U.S. attention from an alleged plot of encircling China and limiting its legitimately growing influence in East Asia. Therefore, Beijing rejected any kind of sanctions against Russia. Generally, China sees the current situation in Ukraine as a "mess" created by the West's ineffective and greedy policy. The Xinhua commentary asserted, "For the rest of the world, once again, people see another great country torn apart because of a clumsy and selfish West that boasts too many lofty ideals but always comes up short of practical solutions."¹² By "mess" Beijing usually means a situation created by Western sponsored actions aimed at undermining stable (often authoritarian) regimes all over the world, which in Beijing's opinion can effectively secure the country's economic development and growing cooperation with China. This term was used to describe the Tiananmen crisis in 1989, "color revolutions" in Arab states, etc. Beijing's regime sees countering this tendency even far from China's borders as a means of protecting itself since it understands that

the same tactics can be used by the West in China. From this point of view China would only welcome Russia's growing will to counter Western expansion, and they both may be interested in having Pyongyang on their side.

The only thing China does not officially support is Russia's decision to annex Crimea. That is why it chose to obtain during the voting at the Security Council. Here Beijing's position will be similar to that on the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia: generally supportive of Russia's actions, but not approving of undermining the territorial integrity of existing states. China's approach is determined by its own separatist problems in Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang.

In the current situation the other sides of the hexagon (Japan and South Korea) will be seen by Moscow and Beijing as allies of the United States, and the approach to them will depend on what position they take. Tokyo and Seoul may not want to sacrifice important trade and economic ties with Russia and China on account of European problems distant from them, and will stick to moderate policies. However, in case of serious differences over the DPRK (e.g. the departure of Russia and China from the sanctions regime as a consequence of the growing general confrontation with the West), they will have to more firmly support their allies.

ENDNOTES

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ASIA'S SLIPPERY SLOPE: TRIANGULAR TENSIONS, IDENTITY GAPS, CONFLICTING REGIONALISM, AND DIPLOMATIC IMPASSE TOWARD NORTH KOREA

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