



Russia and the Koreas: Past Policies and Future Possibilities

by *Richard Weitz*

Geography alone would give Russia a prominent role in the Korean peninsula. The Russian Federation currently shares a recently demarcated 17-kilometer common border along the Tumen River with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).¹ The proximity is sufficient to ensure that Russian leaders closely follow events in the Koreas and try to influence developments. In addition, the histories of the Russian and Korean nations have intertwined for centuries. The Soviet Union created North Korea and imparted the new state with its horrific Stalinist political-economic model. Although Russian-DPRK relations have atrophied since the USSR's demise, ties between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Korea (ROK) have improved considerably in recent years.

Russia pursues a variety of goals with respect to the Koreas. In the economic realm, Russian entrepreneurs envisage revitalizing ties with the DPRK by converting it into a transit country for Russian energy and economic exports to South Korea and other countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Among other benefits, the resulting commercial surge would help integrate Russia further into the prosperous East Asian region and promote the economic recovery of the Russian Far East, which lags behind western Russia economically and is becoming a security liability owing to the demographic collapse of the ethnic Russian population in the Russia-China border regions.

In the area of security, Russian policymakers are eager to normalize the security situation on the Korean peninsula in order to realize their economic ambitions there. Specific Russian goals include ending the DPRK nuclear weapons and missile programs, averting the abrupt collapse of the DPRK regime or a nuclear or ballistic missile proliferation wave in East Asia, and keeping Moscow a major regional security actor. Common Russian tactics or precepts to pursue such ends include inducing North

Korea to end its disruptive nuclear and missile programs voluntarily through economic assistance and security assurances, maintaining a prominent role for Russian diplomacy through joint declarations and other means, promoting dialogue rather than punishment and keeping any needed sanctions limited, and encouraging all parties to adhere to their commitments.

History

The Soviet Union created the DPRK by establishing a separate communist state, led by Kim Il-sung, in the northern half of the Korean peninsula when Soviet forces occupied the region following Japan's surrender in the summer of 1945.² Following the end of World War II, the Soviet Union provided its new ally with economic and military assistance.³ During the 1950–53 Korean War, the USSR and the People's Republic of China (PRC), then ideological allies, jointly backed the DPRK regime with armaments, military advisers, and, in the case of China, hundreds of thousands of armed "volunteers." Until the Soviet Union's demise in 1991, state-to-state relations between the USSR and the DPRK were supplemented by ties between their ruling communist parties. After the Sino-Soviet alliance collapsed in the late 1950s, Moscow and Beijing competed for influence in Pyongyang. Nonetheless, both governments were frustrated with the unpredictable and reflexively xenophobic North Korean leadership, which continually made foreign and domestic policy decisions without securing Moscow's or Beijing's approval. It was not unusual for the DPRK to take significant foreign policy actions—such as confronting the United States or the ROK—without consulting or even notifying Soviet leaders. The DPRK had its own concerns about the USSR, especially Soviet efforts to promote pro-Moscow factions in Pyongyang and a perceived willingness to sacrifice Korean interests when they came into conflict with other Soviet priorities.⁴ The DPRK balanced relations with its two great-power patrons, receiving aid from both without committing to either.

Dr. Weitz's paper is the thirty-first in KEI's Academic Paper Series. As part of this program, KEI commissions and distributes 10 papers per year on original subjects of current interest to over 2,000 Korea watchers, government officials, think tank experts, and scholars around the United States and the world. A public discussion at KEI with the author generally follows in conjunction with distribution. At the end of the year these papers are compiled and published in *On Korea*. Volume 3 of *On Korea* will be published around end-February 2010. For more information, please visit www.keia.org/paper_series.php.

Today, Pyongyang still prefers to deal with Russia and other countries bilaterally rather than collectively.

During most of the 1990s, the new Russian Federation under President Boris Yeltsin shunned the DPRK while pursuing better ties with the ROK. The reorientation actually began during the last few months of the Soviet Union. In September 1990, the Soviet foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, shocked his hosts in Pyongyang when, during a visit to the DPRK, he announced that the Soviet Union would establish diplomatic relations with the ROK and demand that the DPRK pay market prices for Soviet goods using hard currency.⁵ The DPRK could not afford the new prices, and the resulting suspension of Soviet oil deliveries inflicted a brutal blow on the North Korean economy, which until then had oriented about half of its trade with the Soviet Union, receiving large quantities of petroleum and other raw materials at subsidized prices.⁶ From 1992 to 1997, bilateral Russia-DPRK trade turnover shrank eightfold.⁷ Russia ceased providing economic aid, subsidized arms sales, or other special benefits to the DPRK, which could no longer appeal to Marxist-Leninist ideological solidarity when Russian leaders, excluding a few admiring hard-line communists, professed to adhere to democratic or, increasingly, pragmatic nationalist principles.

Russia-ROK ties did improve during the 1990s. In 1990, President Roh Tae-woo rewarded the Soviet government with a \$1.5 billion loan for recognizing the ROK; this followed from his policy of Nordpolitik, which sought to normalize ROK relations with the DPRK's key allies, the USSR and the PRC, in order to gain leverage over Pyongyang.⁸ Roh then hosted President Mikhail Gorbachev on the South Korean resort island of Jeju in April 1991. Yeltsin visited Seoul the following year, and President Kim Young-sam, Roh's successor, traveled to Moscow in 1994.⁹ The leaders of Russia and South Korea have met more than 20 times—on the sidelines of multinational gatherings as well as bilateral summits in each other's countries—since the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1990.¹⁰ But, during the first decade of their new relationship, Moscow's limited leverage in Pyongyang and weak national economy eventually limited South Korean interest in deepening ties with Russia.

Lacking close ties with either Korean state, Russia's status regarding the peninsula's security affairs deteriorated during the 1990s to that of an interested observer.¹¹ Moscow played only a small role during the first Korean nuclear crisis in 1993–94. Despite its pioneering involvement in North Korea's nuclear energy program, Russia did not join the new Korean Peninsula Energy Develop-

ment Organization (KEDO) consortium, a multinational arrangement established to construct two light-water reactors as part of the 1994 Agreed Framework ending the crisis. Russia also stood aside during the four-party talks among China, the United States, and the two Koreas that began in September 1997. Moscow declined to renew the 1961 Soviet-DPRK Friendship and Mutual Assistance Treaty, which had a military intervention clause, when it expired in September 1996.

Yeltsin's successor, Vladimir Putin, sought to reestablish Russia's influence in East Asia, including in North Korea, as part of his broader ambition to reestablish Russia as a great power. Whereas Yeltsin's government shunned Pyongyang in a generally unsuccessful effort to court Seoul, the Putin administration pursued balanced relations with both Korean states.¹² In February 2000, Russia and the DPRK signed a new Treaty on Friendship, Good-Neighborly Relations and Cooperation. That July, Putin became the first Russian (or Soviet) leader to visit Pyongyang, where he signed a new Russia-DPRK cooperation treaty that provides for consultations in the case of mutual threats. When Kim Jong-il proposed in April 2002 holding a three-way summit with Russia and South Korea in Siberia, the gesture suggested that Putin's rapprochement efforts with Pyongyang had made significant headway.¹³

Russia has also deepened commercial relations with the ROK, partially compensating for its constrained economic ties with China and Japan. At their September 2008 summit in Moscow, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and ROK President Lee Myung-bak agreed to upgrade their bilateral ties to that of a "strategic cooperative partnership." Although Russia's economic role on the Korean peninsula lags behind that of many other countries, its status as a full partner in international efforts to resolve the DPRK nuclear crisis ensures that Moscow enjoys considerable influence on Korean security issues.

Current Security Issues

Six-Party Talks

Russia has been a participant, along with North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, and the United States, in the six-party talks that, since 2003, have been seeking to secure an end to the DPRK's nuclear weapons program in return for various economic, diplomatic, and other incentives. The four interconnected objectives of the talks are eliminating nuclear weapons from the Korean peninsula, normalizing relations between the DPRK and all the other parties, securing the economic development and regional integration of North Korea, and achieving an

enduring peace on the Korean peninsula and the broader East Asian region.¹⁴ The talks have been characterized by the old Leninist slogan, “One step forward, two steps back,” except it seems that nine steps back occur for every ten steps forward, with the walker frequently appearing ready to drop dead en route. The parties were able to secure a denuclearization agreement at the end of the fifth round of the talks, which ended on 13 February 2007.¹⁵ Under its terms, North Korea pledged to shut down and eventually dismantle its Yongbyon nuclear complex in return for food, economic aid, and the prospect of normalizing relations with the five other countries. Despite some progress in 2007 and early 2008, progress stalled from mid-2008 to mid-2009 for reasons that appear related to the political succession transition in North Korea.

At present, the DPRK regime is bargaining hard for consenting to return to the six-party talks. DPRK representatives have conditioned rejoining the talks on achieving further progress in Pyongyang’s bilateral dialogue with Washington. Russian officials, though welcoming bilateral discussions between North Korean and U.S. officials, have described them as helping resume the talks rather than replacing them, a development that would weaken Russian influence in the negotiations.¹⁶ They have also supported continuing existing international sanctions against the DPRK pending its compliance with various UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions mandating its cessation of sensitive nuclear activities and launches of ballistic missiles.¹⁷ The DPRK has twice before (2004–05 and 2005–06) boycotted the talks for a year until the other parties, especially Beijing and Washington, made sufficient concessions to entice Pyongyang to rejoin them. Whatever the costs this time for drawing North Korea back, the price for securing the elimination of the DPRK’s arsenal, if this remains possible, is likely to be even higher.

Ballistic Missile Problems

The DPRK’s ballistic missile program, originally based on Soviet-era weapons technology, has presented another major security problem for Russia and other countries. North Korea’s improving ability to target more missiles at more countries, as well as its seeming willingness to sell missiles and missile-related technologies to any foreign buyer, has alarmed much of the international community, especially its neighbors. The ballistic missile issue assumed renewed importance in both 2006 and 2009, when Pyongyang’s decision to resume testing its long-range ballistic missiles led the UNSC to impose sanctions on North Korea. In turn, the DPRK responded on each occasion with aggressive rhetoric and the testing of a nuclear weapon. Although North Korea has received much

criticism for characterizing a thinly disguised ballistic missile program as a space exploration program, South Korea has been developing its own rocket capability with considerable Russian assistance. For both Koreas, their space programs are deeply tied up with intrapeninsular rivalry and global prestige.¹⁸

The most recent missile crisis arose on 5 April 2009, when North Korea launched a rocket that closely resembled its Taepo-dong-2 missile. When the DPRK was visibly preparing to resume launching long-range ballistic missiles before April under the guise of testing space launch vehicles, its five main negotiating partners and other countries threatened and pleaded with Pyongyang to refrain from such action. The United States and its allies argued that the launch would violate a UNSC ban on DPRK missile-related activities and threatened to impose new sanctions should the launch occur. Seeking to avoid another round of sanctions, Chinese and Russian officials urged North Korean restraint. The DPRK ignored these and other international entreaties and warnings. Despite the relatively mild UN action that followed, which consisted of a denunciatory statement read by the rotating UNSC president, the DPRK responded to the UNSC presidential statement by announcing it would permanently withdraw from the six-party talks. It subsequently detonated another nuclear device.

Economic Issues

Russian and North Korean officials have discussed various economic deals, notably some linking a trans-Korean railroad with Russia’s rail system. The construction of such a rail link would allow Russia to become a transit country for South Korean trade with Europe, which now involves mostly ocean shipping. Furthermore, Russian planners want to construct energy pipelines between Russia and South Korea across DPRK territory. The implementation of these proposals awaits normalization of the security situation on the Korean peninsula. Until then, Moscow’s economic ties and influence in Pyongyang will lag far behind South Korea’s and especially China’s, which provides North Korea with most of its foreign assistance, including energy, food, and other key commodities. The DPRK can survive even in the absence of economic ties with Russia; China’s economic assistance is indispensable.

Even with the persistent security tensions, economic cooperation between Russia and South Korea has increased dramatically during the past decade. The commerce involves primarily the exchange of Russian oil and natural gas in return for ROK machinery and equipment. The South Korean military also purchases some Russian de-

fense equipment. The two governments are seeking to deepen their bilateral economic cooperation as well as extend it into other sectors.

North Korea

The direct Russian economic stake in the DPRK is minimal. Unlike China, Russia no longer provides direct economic assistance to North Korea. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's decision to convert all Soviet trade with socialist countries to a hard-currency basis, a practice continued by the Yeltsin administration, precipitated a sharp deterioration in commercial exchanges between the two countries. Under Putin, Moscow suspended all military and nuclear energy cooperation with Pyongyang in line with international norms and sanctions.¹⁹ Although eager to exploit profitable opportunities, Russians generally approach their commercial relations with the DPRK exclusively from a market cost-benefit, which considerably constrains economic ties.

Until recently, a major obstacle to greater Russia-DPRK economic ties was the large debt that North Korea accumulated during the Soviet period. For years, North Korean negotiators indicated they wanted Moscow to write off the entire \$8 billion debt.²⁰ The Russian government proposed various alternative debt settlement options to the DPRK, including exchanging the debt for investment or tangible property, but the North Koreans rejected these arrangements.²¹ Russian negotiators eventually agreed to waive most of the debt as an incentive to secure Pyongyang's return to six-party talks and to eliminate an obstacle to future economic cooperation.²²

In contrast with Russia's border with China, the Russia-DPRK border is usually sealed. In November 1998, Russia, China, and North Korea signed a treaty to demarcate their territorial waters on the Tumen River, which marks the borders of the three countries.²³ In August 2001, DPRK leader Kim Jong-il made headlines when he crossed through the border post of Khasan in an armored train en route to a 10-day visit to Moscow and St. Petersburg. Along with China, Russia does support the free economic trade zone in the port city of Rason.²⁴ Both Russia and China have aggressively developed supply routes to this city, with Russia investing at least \$72 million as of early 2008 to restore its trans-Siberian railroad route and China making its own bid for the future trade volume with the construction of a new highway to complement its existing rail networks.²⁵ In 2009, Russia went further and pledged to spend \$201.8 million to restore the railroad and renovate the city's largest port.²⁶ In early January 2010, Kim Jong-il visited the zone and designated Rason a "special city."²⁷

The level of bilateral trade, which predominately involves Russia's eastern regions, barely exceeded \$200 million in 2006.²⁸ Russian policy is to not sell defense or nuclear energy items to North Korea, and China provides the DPRK with many other imports at subsidized prices. In recent years, Pyongyang's main export to Russia has been labor. Thousands of North Korean workers are employed in Russia's timber and construction industries. They provide one of the few means the DPRK has to earn foreign currency besides exporting weapons and inviting foreign companies to set up shop in North Korea, both of which are risky strategies since they expose the regime to external sanctions and internal democratic contagion, a fear that has impeded South Korean companies employing North Korean workers at the Kaesong industrial complex.

According to one Russian source, each of the 5,000 North Koreans in Vladivostok, who usually receive five-year visas, sends the DPRK government approximately \$800 every month. Anything they earn beyond that, such as by undertaking odd jobs for local Russians, they can keep for themselves.²⁹ In addition, more than 1,000 North Koreans work in a network of remote logging camps in Russia's Amur region, which is more than 1,500 kilometers from the Russia-DPRK border. The camps are run by a Russian company that shares its proceeds with the North Korean government. These laborers tell reporters that they earn a few hundred dollars each month. Some complain that they are not paid regularly and they must work all day in unbearably cold weather with little to eat and with frequent work-related injuries and deaths. Thousands of North Korean laborers have reportedly deserted such camps during the past two decades. Some are lucky to find a sympathetic Russian family to stay with or gain the support of Russian human rights groups, but then they live in constant fear of being arrested and deported to North Korea.³⁰

Despite the low level of recent Russia-DPRK commerce, Russian policymakers and entrepreneurs have visions of transforming North Korea into a pivotal player in their vision of reviving the Russian Far East and integrating Russia more deeply into the prosperous Asia-Pacific region. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and other Russians hope that the six-party talks can resolve the Korean nuclear dispute and establish peace and prosperity on the Korean peninsula, spurring "the development of Russia's Far East and Siberia regions."³¹ The DPRK's continuing frictions with the international community, however, have blocked the potentially lucrative projects under Russian consideration.

South Korea

Russia-ROK economic relations have improved considerably since the end of the Cold War. Trade between Russia and South Korea amounted to \$9.3 billion in 2006, up from \$2.8 billion in 2001.³² By 2008, bilateral trade had reached \$18.4 billion, a 22.4 percent increase from 2007. Although the first half of 2009 saw a 52 percent decline in trade owing to the global financial crisis, further joint projects and mutual investment—ROK direct investment in Russia exceeded \$731 billion in the first quarter of 2009—in petrochemicals, automobiles, and other sectors should soon produce a rebound in bilateral commercial ties as the crisis recedes.³³

An important Russian objective is to secure ROK investment in the Russian Far East, a region rich in natural resources but lacking in people, infrastructure, and commerce. Seeing a natural partnership between ROK technologies and Russian resources, the Russian government has agreed that South Korea can construct a port and an industrial park near Vladivostok for exclusive use by ROK companies, marking the first time Moscow has agreed to build an such a complex for one country's exclusive use.³⁴ The memorandum of understanding envisaging the creation of the complex states that the participating South Korean firms would receive special tax benefits and exemptions from bureaucratic "red tape."³⁵ ROK companies expect to win major contracts to help Russia develop the infrastructure needed for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum that will occur in Vladivostok in 2012.³⁶

Although the Russian and ROK economies are close in aggregate size, the two countries have strengths in different economic sectors.³⁷ For the most part, South Koreans import Russian oil and natural gas while selling Russia ROK-made machinery and equipment. Ties have been growing in various high-technology sectors. In June 2009, the Russian ambassador told the *Korea Times* that, "From sea to the land and outer space" the two countries "have cooperated in all fields."³⁸ More than half of South Korea's civilian helicopters are Russian made, while Russia provides ROK nuclear power plants with more than one-third of their fuel.³⁹

Another exchange involves defense products and services. Russia has supplied tanks, combat vehicles, military helicopters, and other defense equipment to the ROK armed forces as partial payment of Russia's \$2 billion debt to the ROK.⁴⁰ The debt originated in 1991, when the Roh Tae-woo administration extended \$1 billion in bank loans and a \$470 million commodities loan in partial reward for the Soviet Union's recognition of the ROK

government the previous year. The subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union and the impoverishment of the new Russian Federation made it impossible for Moscow to repay the loans in cash. The first two so-called "Brown Bear" arms-for-debt swap deals, negotiated in 1995 and 2003, included T-80U Tanks, METIS-M anti-tank missiles, BMP infantry fighting vehicles, Kamov Ka-32 transport helicopters, and Murena-E hovercraft.

Russian and ROK representatives are now negotiating another arms deal using a different arrangement. Instead of another arms-for-debt swap, South Korea will instead purchase any military equipment and technologies it acquires outright, while Russia will repay the remaining \$1.3 billion debt over the next decade. The two sides have yet to resolve which defense items to include in their next transaction. Whereas the Russian government wants to provide already manufactured weapons systems as in the two previous deals, South Korean negotiators now want Russia to transfer sophisticated defense technologies as well as turn-key weapons. The current technologies under discussion range from submarine fuel cells, long-range radar systems, to systems designed to defend electronics against an electromagnetic pulse (EMP) attack.⁴¹ The two governments are also seeking to expand their economic cooperation into other sectors, including nuclear energy and other high-technology areas.⁴²

ROK-Russia commerce has proven especially important for some companies. For example, the Hyundai Group last fall was selling more cars in Russia than any other firm, accounting for 9.4 percent of the market share, while the giant Korean business conglomerate also buys coal from Russia and runs farms on Russian territory.⁴³ In the fall of 2008, Hyundai agreed to form a strategic alliance with the Russian private equity firm, Industrial Investors, to pursue energy, social infrastructure, and transportation development opportunities in Russia.⁴⁴ Hyundai executives are expanding their collaboration in other high-technology areas.⁴⁵ Samsung has also begun to emerge as a major high-technology player in Russia. Since September 2009, the company has made its high-speed wireless Internet technology available across Russia. On 7 October 2009 it agreed to help expand the cutting-edge wireless network WiMAX to 38 more Russian cities in cooperation with the Russian provider, Yota.⁴⁶ Building on their success in Russia, the two companies are now launching WiMAX in Nicaragua and announced their intentions to expand WiMAX service further across Central and South America as well as into eastern Europe.⁴⁷ Other profitable joint Russian-ROK business ventures have arisen in shipbuilding, oil development, and the uranium mining sectors.⁴⁸

Russian-ROK economic ties would surge if they realized their ambitious plans for massive transportation and energy projects, including a trans-peninsular gas pipeline and a rail network that would connect the Trans-Siberian Railway and the Trans-Korean Railway by linking Russia's Khasan, the North Korean border town of Tuman-gang, and China's Tumen.⁴⁹ The rail project would boost trade by decreasing transportation costs and delivery time. May 2007 saw the first test run of two passenger trains across the Korean Demilitarized Zone; the experiment was repeated six months later with a ROK cargo train.⁵⁰ In April 2009, a Russian company and a Chinese firm signed an agreement to complete the railway. Before the onset of the latest nuclear crisis, they had hoped a North Korean company would join them in May 2009. The construction of such a link would allow Russia to become a transit country for South Korean trade with Europe, which now flows mostly by ocean shipping.⁵¹ Furthermore, Russian planners want to construct energy pipelines between Russia and South Korea across North Korean territory.⁵² Russian policymakers describe their involvement in these regional economic projects as contributing to regional peace and security as well as prosperity. With reference to these ventures, Gleb Ivashentsov, until recently Russia's ambassador to Seoul, asserted in January 2009 that "there is no better way than long-term economic projects to rebuild trust between North and South Korea."⁵³

When President Lee visited Moscow in September 2008, Russia and the ROK signed a massive natural gas deal estimated to be worth \$90 billion. According to its provisions, South Korea will import 10 billion cubic meters of Russian gas annually during a 30-year period beginning in 2015.⁵⁴ An October 2006 Russian-ROK gas cooperation agreement authorizes Russia's state-controlled Gazprom and South Korea's state-run Korea Gas Corporation (Kogas) to oversee Russian natural gas deliveries to South Korea.⁵⁵ The two conglomerates initially intended to construct a \$3 billion overland pipeline running from Vladivostok in Russia's Far East through North Korea to South Korea. Kogas estimated that the ROK will import approximately 20 percent of its natural gas needs in 2015 from Russia.⁵⁶

Plans for such an overland pipeline originated years earlier but have faced repeated difficulties owing to commercial infighting among Russian energy companies, the inability of Russia and China to negotiate a mutually acceptable agreement that would allow Russia to send gas to both the PRC and the ROK, and North Korea's erratic position on the trans-peninsular pipeline project. The new, conservative ROK government of President Lee, which has adopted a more skeptical view of economic

cooperation with the DPRK, has recently encouraged consideration of alternative pipeline routes that would bypass North Korean territory. Ambassador Ivashentsov said, "It will be cheaper but we can't make our joint project a hostage to North Korea. We have encountered such problems with Ukraine, . . ." The ambassador was alluding to the interruptions of Russian energy deliveries to European countries whenever an energy conflict arises between Russia and Ukraine. Ambassador Ivashentsov reflected Russia's genuine apprehension about making Russia-ROK ties depend on the DPRK when he added, "From Russia's perspective, Ukraine is a more predictable partner than North Korea."⁵⁷ Despite its higher costs, Gazprom and Kogas have discussed the possibility of building an underwater pipeline connecting Vladivostok with either Samcheok on South Korea's east coast or Busan, the largest port in the ROK.⁵⁸ Its prospects are uncertain as it might prove less expensive to simply ship the gas.⁵⁹ On 29 August 2009, Kogas announced that, unless North Korea explicitly requested that the pipeline be built on its soil, the company would discard the project in favor of importing additional gas in liquefied form from Russia by ship.⁶⁰

At present, the ROK imports almost all its natural gas in liquefied form.⁶¹ South Korea currently pays remarkably low prices for the liquefied natural gas (LNG) it acquires from Russia's Sakhalin gas reserve. A 2004 agreement between Russia and the ROK established that South Korea would import 1.5 million tons of LNG annually over a 20-year period starting in 2009. The terms set the price at \$25 a barrel, which roughly equated to the corresponding cost of a barrel of crude oil in 2004. In 2009, Russia asked to renegotiate the deal owing to the surge in oil and LNG prices in recent years, but the ROK has insisted on adhering to the conditions stipulated in the original agreement. Russian negotiators may offer the ROK more joint energy development opportunities or other incentives to agree to amend the 2004 price formula.⁶²

Russia has also helped the ROK further its space exploration ambitions. In 2004, the Russian government negotiated a \$250 million deal to help develop the Korea Space Launch Vehicle 1 rocket.⁶³ In a disappointment for the program, the summer 2009 satellite launch proved to be a failure because of technical difficulties arising from South Korea's design work (the Russia-designed first stage of the KSLV-1 reportedly worked flawlessly).⁶⁴ Despite this setback, Russia is contracted for a second and a third launch and will continue to play a crucial role in Korea's space program by providing advanced technologies not yet available in South Korea. The recent launch also allowed Russia to test the first stage of its Angara rocket, which has been in development for more than 10

years and is expected to make its first multistaged flight in 2011.⁶⁵

Whatever their mutual economic benefits, these bilateral commercial relations provide both Russia and South Korea with leverage in their relations with other parties. For example, ROK economic ties with Russia, as with China, help shape Moscow's and Beijing's policies toward the DPRK. From Moscow's perspective, they also help reaffirm Russia's status as an important player in East Asia after a period during the 1990s when many observers questioned whether Russia remained a regional player.

Security Goals and Tactics

Removing obstacles to Russia's deeper integration into the economically vibrant East Asian region partly explains why Russian officials have been seeking to reduce tensions on the Korean peninsula. If the DPRK can normalize its relations with other countries, Russian businesses can use North Korean territory as a platform for realizing their regional integration objectives. Reducing the prospects for war on the Korean peninsula is also important for averting the incalculable economic, security, and other costs that arise from having a potential nuclear war occur on its doorstep. In January 2009, Ambassador Ivashentsov said that regional stability is "crucial to Russia's economic development," especially plans to increase exploitation of the natural resources located in Siberia and the Far East. Comparing Russian energy ambitions in eastern Russia with "the development of the American West," he explained that "Russia needs security guarantees in neighboring countries" for its realization.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, Russian security goals and tactics regarding the Koreas are multiple and, as with other countries, not always in harmony.

Goal No. 1: Prevent DPRK Nuclear Weapons

Russian leaders were clearly angered by Kim Jong-il's defiance of their warnings against testing a nuclear weapon in October 2006. On 5 February 2007, Ambassador Ivashentsov, complained, "the site of the nuclear test by the DPRK on October 9th, 2006, is situated at the distance of just 177 kms to our border. We do not like that. We do not need in the proximity of our borders neither nuclear and missile tests nor saber-rattling by anyone."⁶⁷ The Russian delegation to the six-party talks subsequently demanded that the DPRK dismantle its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon rather than simply suspend operations there in order to promote North Korea's irreversible nuclear disarmament.⁶⁸ In late May 2007, Putin signed a decree banning the Russian government and private institutions from transferring equipment, materials, or knowledge

that the DPRK could use to develop weapons. It also forbade Russian citizens or institutions from engaging in financial operations with people or entities designated by the UN as supporting North Korea's nuclear weapons program.⁶⁹ Russian strategists consider a nuclear-armed DPRK as posing only an indirect threat because they do not expect that North Korea would have reason to attack Russia even though many Russians sometimes worry about loose DPRK nuclear material or wayward North Korean missiles.⁷⁰ Even so, "In regard to the North Korean nuclear issue," Lee Youn-ho, South Korea's newly appointed ambassador to Russia and previously the country's first minister of knowledge economy, remarked on 10 February 2010, "there is no difference of opinion between Russia and our government. Russia is taking a stance that is very supportive of our position."⁷¹

Goal No. 2: Suspend DPRK Missile Tests

Russian leaders have also sought to constrain North Korea's testing of long-range ballistic missiles. Many Russians consider the DPRK missiles as posing a possible threat to Russian territory owing to their proximity and inaccuracy. In July 2006, North Korea launched seven missiles that landed in the Sea of Japan within Russia's 200-nautical-mile (370 km) exclusive economic zone.⁷² One missile apparently veered off course and landed near the Russian port of Nakhodka.⁷³ Russia's most important Pacific Coast city and the main port of Russia's Pacific Fleet, Vladivostok, is located only 140 kilometers from North Korean territory. In October 2006, the Russian delegation voted in favor of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1718, which mandated a moratorium on the DPRK's testing of ballistic missiles. When the DPRK made evident its preparation to resume missile testing in early 2009, the Russian military announced that it had deployed advanced missile defenses nearby to counter any DPRK missiles heading toward Russian territory. General Nikolai Makarov, chief of staff of Russia's armed forces, even claimed to have deployed a division of Russia's most advanced air defense system, the S-400, to the Russian Far East.⁷⁴ President Medvedev has cited North Korea's missile launches as well as its nuclear weapons tests as a "concern for us," given that "we are located in close proximity to this country."⁷⁵

Goal No. 3: No Forceful Regime Change

Russian officials seek to change Pyongyang's behavior, but not its regime. They remain more concerned about the potential immediate collapse of the DPRK than about its government's intransigence regarding its nuclear or missile development programs. North Korea's disintegration could induce widespread economic disruptions

in East Asia, generate large refugee flows across Russia's borders, weaken Russia's influence in the Koreas by ending its unique status as interlocutor with Pyongyang, and potentially remove a buffer zone separating Russia's borders from U.S. ground forces based in South Korea. At worst, North Korea's demise could precipitate a military conflict on the peninsula, which could spill across into Russian territory. In addition, the substantial South Korean investment flowing into Russia would be redirected toward North Korea's rehabilitation in advance of the peninsula's possible reunification. Hoped-for Chinese investment capital would be less likely to materialize in this case as well. Almost any conceivable armed clash on the Korean peninsula would worsen Russia's relations with the parties to the conflict.

Tensions arose during the George W. Bush administration between Washington and Moscow when Russian leaders, like other foreign governments, feared the United States might resort to unilateral military action to attack the DPRK's nuclear weapons and missile programs. Moscow joined with Beijing and Seoul to encourage restraint in both Pyongyang and Washington. Russian officials, like their Chinese and South Korean counterparts, oppose North Korea's nuclear weapons programs. Nonetheless, most of them—and each person naturally weighs the risks and likely consequences of either outcome differently—tend to worry more about U.S., DPRK, or other military actions that could engender chaos on the Korean peninsula than they do about the prospects of North Korea's acquiring a few nuclear weapons.

Goal No. 4: Avert Cascading Proliferation

A major Russian goal in East Asia is to prevent DPRK actions from encouraging other countries, either through emulation or for defensive reasons, to pursue their own offensive and defensive strategic weapons, especially nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles or ballistic missile defenses. As a matter of principle, Russian government representatives stress their support for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which legitimizes Russia's status as one of the few nuclear weapons states. More pragmatically, Russian policymakers have opposed North Korea's acquisition of nuclear weapons for fear it might induce South Korea, Japan, and even Taiwan to pursue their own nuclear forces, which under some contingencies might be used against Russia. They further fear that North Korea's ostentatious displays of its improving missile and nuclear capacities will encourage the United States, Japan, Taiwan, and other states to develop missile defenses that in turn could be used to negate Russian missiles.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov made evident Russia's concerns about further strategic weapons proliferation when he visited Seoul in April 2009. Lavrov told the press: "I hope that no one would . . . use the situation around North Korea to set up alliances, build missile defense networks or announce an intention to possess nuclear weapons." Alluding to Japan, he added, "Unfortunately, we hear these announcements from a neighboring country. We think that it is unacceptable."⁷⁶ When traveling to Japan a few weeks later, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin likewise warned: "I think it would be completely wrong if we heightened the emotional intensity of our response to the present events and used it to upset the situation in the region or to start an arms race. I think that would be the greatest possible mistake, which would lead us to a dead end."⁷⁷

Goal No 5: Keep Russia a Player

Russian officials constantly fear being shunted aside in the Korea peace and security dialogue despite what they see as Moscow's obvious interest in the results. Although the Russian Federation is a country bordering on the Pacific Ocean, few East Asians perceive it as a major player owing to the traditionally European focus of Russian leaders and the weak ties linking Russia to East Asian economic and other integration processes. More generally, Russian government leaders assert that Russia is a great power that should be involved in any important international security issue. For this reason, Russian policymakers strive to maintain a central role for the six-party talks, a framework that, like the United Nations, substantiates Moscow's claims to great-power status in negotiating East Asian security issues. At the end of 2009, as on many previous occasions, Foreign Minister Lavrov insisted, "We consider it imperative to discuss all the issues that emerge [regarding the DPRK nuclear issue] precisely in this format."⁷⁸ Russia chairs the six-party working group responsible for addressing regional security issues, a position that, should the talks make greater progress, would help Moscow compensate for its otherwise limited role in the existing security institutions in the Asia-Pacific region (which primarily comprise bilateral defense and security alliances between the United States and key Pacific countries).

Russian policymakers now perceive they made a mistake during the 1990s during the administration of Boris Yeltsin. Eager to cultivate the then economically booming South Korea, they let Russia's relations with the DPRK atrophy—ironically, only to see Russia's appeal to South Korea dwindle because ROK policymakers saw Moscow as well as Beijing as potential mediators with Pyongyang. The decrease in Russia's influence over

Pyongyang meant a corresponding loss of ROK interest in cooperating with Moscow. Since Putin became Russia's prime leader in late 1999, Moscow has pursued a policy of engaging with both Koreas to enhance its leverage with all parties.

Tactic No. 1: The Ukrainian Model

Some Russian analysts have explicitly advocated applying a "Ukrainian model" to the Korean nuclear crisis, while many others seem to support this outcome without using the phrase. In this scenario, the DPRK would voluntarily surrender its nuclear weapons in return for economic assistance and security assurances from the other great powers.⁷⁹ This outcome would reduce the risks of a military conflict on Russia's borders and facilitate Russia's use of DPRK territory to deepen economic ties with the ROK and perhaps other countries. Russian policymakers would definitely prefer this outcome to two other possible scenarios—applying economic, diplomatic, and other nonmilitary pressure against the DPRK to induce it to reverse its proliferation policies, as was done with Libya, or employing armed intervention to seize sites of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and replace the regime, as occurred with Iraq in 2003.

In practice, major differences between the Ukrainian and Korean cases might make a straightforward application of the Ukrainian model to the DPRK more difficult. Ukraine had not been a longtime nuclear aspirant like the DPRK. Instead, Ukraine became a nuclear weapons state overnight by inheriting nuclear weapons when the Soviet Union collapsed. In addition, Ukraine's leaders did not perceive an imminent external military threat that nuclear weapons would help address, whereas for decades North Korean leaders have feared a major U.S. military attack.

Tactic No. 2: Moscow as Mediator

Russian policymakers highlight their important role regarding Korean security issues by emphasizing their ability to communicate with all parties thanks to their good relations with every player. Russian diplomacy has pursued a similar strategy in the Middle East, justifying Russia's ties with Iran, Hamas, and other controversial actors by citing Moscow's value for preserving lines of communication and opportunities for mediation among the parties in conflict. Unfortunately, Russia has not enjoyed sufficient influence in either region to broker a settlement.

Putin took it upon himself to improve relations with North Korea after a decade of Russian neglect during the

Yeltsin administration in the 1990s. To this end, Putin made a personal visit to Pyongyang in July 2000. But Putin suffered an embarrassment a few days later when he announced at the Group of Eight summit that Kim Jong-il had told him that North Korea would abandon its ballistic missile programs in return for international assistance in creating a civilian space program. The DPRK government quickly disavowed Putin's statement, terming it a joke.⁸⁰ Nonetheless, Russia has continued to seek a mediator role in Korea, emphasizing its stance of benign neutrality regarding the tensions among the various parties.

On 23 April 2009, Lavrov became the first foreign minister from one of the six parties to visit Pyongyang since the DPRK had resumed testing ballistic missiles and withdrawn from the six-party talks. In an effort to restart the talks, the Russian Foreign Minister delivered a private letter from Putin to North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, who declined to meet with Lavrov.⁸¹ The Russian foreign minister then went to South Korea, where he told the press that Russia was prepared to launch DPRK satellites on Russian rockets, a service Russia was already providing ROK satellites.⁸² Russian diplomats subsequently stressed that they were in contact with all the other parties in their effort to resume the talks. Telling the Russian media that "communication channels have not been cut off and it would be strange if this happened," Deputy Foreign Minister Alexei Borodavkin said that Russian diplomats were holding consultations through both the DPRK embassy in Moscow and the Russian embassy in Pyongyang. Adding that he had also talked with senior ROK, U.S., and Japanese officials, Borodavkin added, "We are thinking of how to find the way out of this deadlock situation and hold consultations with partners and want to discover opportunities to resume the talks."⁸³

Perhaps Russia's most successful intervention to further the talks came when the Russian government played a decisive role in overcoming a major deadlock in the denuclearization process by helping North Korea recover \$25 million deposited in Macao's Banco Delta Asia. The bank froze the funds in September 2005 after U.S. authorities designated the money as illegal profits gained from counterfeiting and money laundering and sanctioned the bank. The DPRK conditioned its implementation of the February 2005 denuclearization agreement closing its main nuclear reactor at Yongbyon on its recovering this money, but no Western bank would participate in the transaction for fear of incurring U.S. financial sanctions. After receiving guarantees of immunity from the United States, Russian officials arranged for the funds to reach the DPRK in June 2007 via the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, the Central Bank of Russia, and Russia's Far

Eastern Commercial Bank (Dalkombank), where North Korea had an account.⁸⁴

Tactic No. 3: Dialogue Rather Than Punishment

Russian diplomats generally oppose using sanctions to punish countries whose governments misbehave. In the case of the DPRK, as with Iran, Russian policymakers argue that a non-coercive, incentive-based strategy offers the best means for persuading North Korea to denuclearize. After the October 2006 DPRK nuclear test, Putin declared it was important not to back North Korea into a corner and leave it with no option but to raise tensions—the same argument he regularly makes regarding Iran.⁸⁵ Russian policymakers also strove to break the escalating tensions in early 2009 when the DPRK government was preparing to launch a rocket and threatened retaliation if the UN sanctioned it in response.⁸⁶ While seeking to dissuade a DPRK rocket launch, Russian officials also argued against sanctioning Pyongyang further on the grounds that additional sanctions would drive the DPRK government into deeper and aggressive alienation, scuttling hopes for early implementation of its denuclearization commitments.

After the DPRK went ahead with the launches, Medvedev argued that, although Russia has supported international sanctions against Pyongyang for its nuclear tests and missile launches, “that does not mean that we must continually inflame passions. On the contrary, we must seek ways and approaches to convince our North Korean colleagues to talk to us, because I don’t want to be forced to imagine any other course of events,” adding that—in an allusion to the DPRK’s nuclear capabilities—“if something does happen, it will be the worst scenario, the most appalling one we can imagine.” For this reason, he concluded, “there is no alternative to a dialogue with North Korea. We need to use every possible means.”⁸⁷

The Russian Foreign Ministry issued a sharp note of condemnation after North Korea detonated another nuclear weapon on 25 May 2009. The statement called the test a “violation” of previous Security Council resolutions and a “serious blow” to the nuclear nonproliferation regime. It also complained that “the latest DPRK moves are provoking an escalation of tension in Northeast Asia.”⁸⁸ Foreign Minister Lavrov advocated the adoption of a strongly condemnatory UN Security Council resolution, but he opposed adopting further sanctions or other punishment for punishment’s sake; instead he endorsed a resumption of the six-party talks. “We should not look to punish for the sake of punishment only. . . . The problem can only be settled through talks.”⁸⁹

Tactic No. 4: Limited Sanctions

Russian officials perceive applying limited sanctions on the DPRK as a “lesser evil” between doing nothing and imposing more severe sanctions or using force. They have sought to keep sanctions limited to meet the demands from the other players to pressure North Korea while not driving Pyongyang into belligerence. As one of the five permanent UN Security Council members, Russia can exercise a veto in the Security Council. Moscow has blocked proposed resolutions imposing severe sanctions on the DPRK or authorizing the use of force to enforce DPRK compliance with UNSC resolutions. But Russian policymakers have supported some penalties in order to keep the UN and Russia as central players in the international response to the Korean issue. Russian diplomats fear a repeat of the Kosovo (1998) and Iraq (2003) examples, when Western governments decided to bypass the UN and employ force on their own initiative through coalitions of the willing after they could not work through the UNSC owing to Moscow’s veto. Russian diplomats must balance blocking harsh UN sanctions while sustaining Western interests and aspirations that working through the UN remains a fruitful tactic.

In response to the DPRK’s nuclear test on 9 October 2006, the UNSC enacted Resolution 1718 on 14 October. The text condemned North Korea’s nuclear test and banned the transfer of items related to the DPRK’s nuclear, ballistic missile, and other unconventional weapons programs. UNSCR 1718 also freezes the foreign assets and prohibits international travel of those individuals involved in the DPRK’s nuclear, ballistic missile, and other WMD programs, along with their family members. Additional provisions prohibit the transfer of major conventional weapons systems—such as attack helicopters, combat aircraft, tanks, and warships—as well as luxury goods to North Korea. To enforce its provisions, UNSCR 1718 gave countries the right to inspect cargo moving to and from North Korea. Despite the efforts of the United States and Japan to enact a more strongly worded resolution, Russia and China excluded language that might authorize UN members to enforce resolution provisions with military action.⁹⁰ The Russian and Chinese delegations insisted that the resolution aim less to punish North Korea retroactively than to modify its future policies.

Russia also joined with China to moderate the sanctions imposed after the DPRK’s April 2009 long-range ballistic missile test. After what the DPRK termed its “space rocket” apparently fell harmlessly into the sea, the Russian delegation to the Security Council engaged in tough negotiations with the other permanent UNSC members over how to respond. Eventually, delegation members

decided that the rotating president of the UNSC for that month, Ambassador Claude Heller of Mexico, could issue a statement that termed the launch a “contravention” of UNSCR 1718, which forbids the DPRK from engaging in missile-related activities.⁹¹ The United States and Japan had initially sought another formal UNSC resolution that imposed immediate penalties on the DPRK, but Russia opposed such a move. The Russian delegation also tried to delay efforts to tighten the existing sanctions in order to avert a further escalation of tensions and instead coax Pyongyang back to the negotiating table.⁹²

Tactic No. 5: Joint Statements

Another way Russia has affirmed its role in the Korean nuclear talks is by referring to the nuclear issue in its joint statements with the other six-party-talks members. By making such joint declarations, Russia’s dialogue partners affirm Moscow’s role as a legitimate player on the Korea issue. The overlapping perspectives in Moscow and Beijing on many Korean security issues make China a favorite Russian partner in this enterprise. In their June 2009 joint statement, for example, the Russian and Chinese governments devoted several paragraphs to their “grave concern over the situation on the Korean Peninsula.” The two governments called for a peaceful resolution of the dispute over North Korea’s nuclear weapons within the framework of the six-party talks.⁹³

Russian and U.S. leaders have cited their cooperation in managing the North Korean nuclear dispute as evidence that, despite their many bilateral differences, the two governments can continue to work together in solving important international security issues.⁹⁴ In their April 2008 Strategic Framework Declaration, for instance, presidents Putin and Bush reaffirmed their commitment to the six-party talks, the implementation of UNSCR 1718, and “the ultimate goals of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.”⁹⁵ In their joint security statement the following year, presidents Medvedev and Obama expressed their mutual support for “the continuation of the six-party talks at an early date.” They also “agreed to continue to pursue the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in accordance with purposes and principles of the 19 September 2005, Joint Statement and subsequent consensus documents.”⁹⁶

Tactic No. 6: No Double Standards

While criticizing the DPRK for testing nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles, Russian government representatives have also faulted Western countries for failing to meet their previous commitments to the DPRK, implying that this failure might have precipitated the

subsequent North Korean behavior. In September 2008, Lavrov chastised Japan’s government for failing to render its share of economic assistance to the DPRK on account of its bilateral dispute regarding the Japanese citizens abducted by North Korean intelligence agents between 1977 and 1983.⁹⁷ Russian officials also criticized Washington when Moscow considered U.S. negotiating tactics excessively inflexible.⁹⁸ When in Pyongyang in April 2009, Lavrov called on all parties to fulfill the existing agreements, arguing that “if everybody takes such a stand, we will be able to get through the crisis.”⁹⁹ Georgy Toloraya, program director of the Russian Academy of Science’s Korean Institute of Economics, argues, “The current cycle of tensions leading to the emergence of the DPRK as a de-facto nuclear weapons state started when . . . North Koreans grew frustrated as their actual gains from the diplomatic process were marginal—they did not come much closer to obtaining substantial security guarantees.” As a result, “Kim Jong Il probably considered that the incoming Obama administration would not take North Korea seriously enough” unless a “strategy of increasing tensions to raise the stakes was adopted.”¹⁰⁰

Future Possibilities

In the near term, Moscow will play an essential role in determining what economic sanctions might be imposed on the DPRK—owing to both its own authoritative status as a veto-wielding member of the UNSC and also the dynamics of the Russia-China relationship on the Security Council. The PRC government has traditionally avoided being isolated on international security issues, including voting in the UNSC. If Moscow does not block a UNSC resolution, Beijing will almost always abstain rather than cast the sole veto

Russia’s influence could also help shape the current debate over whether to continue adhering to the principle of “commitment for commitment, action for action” that has been the basis of the six-party talks.¹⁰¹ This approach expected that the other parties would provide the DPRK with discrete rewards for each concrete step Pyongyang took toward denuclearization. Although this process of reciprocal concessions was supposed to yield mutually reinforcing improvements, it frequently worked in the reverse. When the DPRK or its negotiating parties took some objectionable action, the others would retaliate, leading to a series of tit-for-tat exchanges that soon undid earlier progress.

More recently, some of the participating governments, especially South Korea’s, have been seeking a “grand bargain” that would have the DPRK immediately end its nuclear and ballistic missile programs in return for the

other parties providing a comprehensive range of economic assistance, diplomatic initiatives, and security assurances to North Korea.¹⁰² Like those advocating a comprehensive settlement to the Israel-Palestine dispute, some negotiators hope that it will prove easier and faster to agree to a broad package deal that entails explicit trade-offs than to negotiate a multitude of specific issues in isolation. They also anticipate that such a framework could build on areas of greater mutual interest, such as energy security and economic development, rather than focus almost exclusively on the issue of eliminating North Korea's nuclear weapons. In early February 2010, Konstantin Vnukov, who became Russia's ambassador to South Korea a few months earlier, declared his government's readiness to accelerate various DPRK-related economic projects as Moscow's contribution to ROK President Lee Myung-bak's "Grand Bargain" proposal. Without going into details, Vnukov mentioned the proposed gas pipelines and railways that might traverse North Korea.¹⁰³

Furthermore, as Russia and the United States look for areas of cooperation to reset their relationship, the Korean peninsula offers certain advantages. Unlike in the case of Iran, where certain Russian interest groups perceive benefits from continuing tensions between Tehran and the West, or in Afghanistan, where cross-pressured interests also prevail along with a certain *schadenfreude* among Russian leaders, Moscow and Washington share the same long-term vision for the Koreas: a non-nuclear and peaceful region integrated into the global economy as an important transit zone and industrial center.

A key issue is reconciling the sometimes conflicting stances of Russia and the United States regarding how best to realize their common goals. Perhaps the most fundamental difference is that, whereas most U.S. officials would accept some instability—including the DPRK's collapse and Korean reunification—to prevent the DPRK from becoming a nuclear weapons state, Russian policymakers generally would prefer the status quo to the disorders that would accompany regime change in the DPRK. But Russian policy makers may differ from their Chinese counterparts in that they generally would welcome Korea's peaceful reunification since it would reduce the risk of war in northeast Asia and facilitate the building of trans-Korean pipelines, railways, and the other commercial arteries that would integrate the Russian Far East more deeply into the prosperous East Asian economic region.

Another Russia-America difference might arise should the sides proceed to negotiate a Korean peace agreement to replace the current armistice. The current U.S. position appears to be that the parties to the negotiations should

be the two Koreas, China, and the United States. Russian policymakers would not welcome exclusion from the peace talks given their security interests in the outcome and Moscow's general aspiration to play a prominent role in East Asian affairs.

That said, Russian decision makers might be willing to make concessions regarding the Koreas in return for diplomatic gains affecting issues Moscow considers more important—such as European security and Georgia.¹⁰⁴ Russia's current leaders often think in terms of spheres of influence and geopolitical trade-offs. U.S. political discourse abhors the use of such terms although U.S. diplomacy sometimes accepts their existence in practice (for example, the divisions of Europe and Korea during the Cold War). In any case, the current U.S. administration seems uninterested in pursuing policies aimed directly at regime change given the risks of unintended consequences and a lack of regional support for confrontational policies, so Russia and the United States can pursue parallel policies that could encourage the DPRK's long-term evolution into a less disruptive state while constraining its belligerent tendencies in the interim. Russian policymakers might privately welcome the irony of practicing Cold War-style containment toward a communist Korean state in partnership with the United States.

If the DPRK's mellowing is ever realized, Russia might contribute its nuclear expertise to assist with restructuring North Korea's nuclear energy program in more peaceful directions. Russia's leading capabilities in outer space research and space propulsion technologies would also position Moscow well to help redirect the DPRK missile program, perhaps in partnership with the ROK, which is collaborating with Russia to develop its own space launch vehicles and expertise. Moscow has already signaled its readiness to assist the DPRK's space research program as an incentive contributing to the cessation of North Korean missile launches. North Korean officials might in turn feel more comfortable allowing Russian officials, rather than representatives of Western governments or other bodies, to monitor and assist with the restructuring of their nuclear and missile programs.

If the DPRK were to collapse, Chinese leaders might prefer to see Russian forces occupy North Korea to lock down the country's WMD assets and provide humanitarian assistance rather than use Chinese forces for that purpose or accept a northward deployment of U.S. troops that would eliminate the buffer zone separating them from the Chinese mainland. PRC representatives refuse to discuss such contingencies with Americans or South Koreans for fear of annoying the DPRK, but they could more securely communicate their thoughts through

Russian security experts, who could then transmit them to U.S. and ROK interlocutors. This communication process could also work profitably in reverse to ensure that PRC officials are prepared for how the United States, the ROK, and perhaps Japan might respond to regime change or collapse in North Korea.

Another possible scenario could be a joint Russia-China military occupation of the DPRK should the regime in Pyongyang collapse. In such an eventuality, other countries might contemplate moving military forces into North Korea to avert a humanitarian disaster (which could include a massive flight of refugees into neighboring Chinese and Russian territory as well as South Korea) and secure the DPRK's nuclear explosive devices and other weapons before they could fall into the hands of terrorists, criminals, or other rogue regimes. Moscow and Beijing might want to occupy the territory first rather than allow U.S. forces to move so close to their borders. A joint occupation might also occur if neither Russia nor China felt comfortable allowing the other to dominate the peninsula through unilateral occupation. Moscow and Beijing have employed such a condominium model in Central Asia, within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, to moderate their concerns about the other's regional aspirations.

Russia and China have already conducted a war game that could provide a dress rehearsal of such a joint occupation. In August 2005, Russia and China practiced a major military exercise, Peace Mission 2005, near North Korea. It was unprecedented in the history of relations between Beijing and Moscow and involved a three-phase operation that began in Vladivostok and then moved to China's Shandong peninsula, where the participants conducted ground operations followed by amphibious maneuvers.¹⁰⁵ While the Chinese supplied most of the troops (8,000 compared with Russia's 2,000), the Russians provided the most sophisticated equipment, including Russian Tu-160 and Tu-95 strategic bombers as well as some 140 warships.¹⁰⁶ The maneuvers practiced during Peace Mission 2005 included neutralizing anti-aircraft defenses, enforcing a maritime blockade, and conducting an amphibious assault and other joint maritime operations.¹⁰⁷

Finally, the Russian chair of the six-party working group responsible for addressing regional security issues, Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Losyukov, declared his government's long-term objective of establishing a more permanent institution than the six-party talks to address Northeast Asian security issues.¹⁰⁸ Thus far, the stalemated talks have prevented the parties from considering these longer-term issues. But it would be good for Russia and the other parties, naturally dispirited by current

tensions, to keep thinking about the hopeful opportunities for securing Northeast Asia's security and prosperity in coming years once they have surmounted the present crisis.

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