

**THE RUSSIAN RESPONSE TO THE NORTH KOREAN  
NUCLEAR CRISIS:**

**Debates and Decisions**

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## **Executive Summary**

After the second crisis over North Korea's nuclear issue erupted, in August 2003 Russia for the first time joined a multinational conference on North Korea's nuclear issue. This restored its voice in Korean affairs. After the acute disappointment at being marginalized in the first nuclear crisis, officials under Boris Yeltsin again sought to raise Russia's profile on the peninsula from the mid-90s. The move to balance relations with the two Koreas culminated in President Vladimir Putin's framework of both improving relations with the DPRK (North Korea) and keeping good rapport with the ROK (South Korea), while intensifying collaborative actions regarding Korea with other international players – the United States, China, and Japan. Explaining how this framework is operating, this paper examines Russian contributions at the six-party talks and views on the North Korean nuclear issue.

## **Introduction**

After the second crisis over North Korea's nuclear issue erupted, in August 2003 Russia for the first time joined a multinational conference on North Korea's nuclear issue. This restored its voice in Korean affairs. The Korean peninsula had remained in the focus of Russia's attention throughout the twentieth century. Tsar Nicolas II, Lenin, Stalin, Brezhnev, and finally Gorbachev, for various reasons and in different forms, tried to get the upper hand in this East Asian nation. After the acute disappointment at being marginalized in the first nuclear crisis, officials under Boris Yeltsin again sought to raise Russia's profile on the peninsula from the mid-90s. The move to balance relations with the two Koreas culminated in President Vladimir Putin's framework of both improving relations with the DPRK (North Korea) and keeping good rapport with the ROK (South Korea), while intensifying collaborative actions regarding Korea with other international players – the United States, China, and Japan.<sup>1</sup> Explaining how this framework is operating, this paper examines Russian contributions at the six-party talks and views on the North Korean nuclear issue.

There is no serious challenge to the overall Putin framework; however, the new nuclear crisis rekindled debates in the Russian expert community as well as in the media concerning how to appraise the stands of North and South Korea, the United States, China and Japan. In the process, discussion turned not only to prospects for unification of the Korean nation but also to the roots of the current problem. Most experts of the liberal (pro-Western) and centrist (pro-government) persuasions paint a similar picture of the sequence of events in Korea after World War II. They admit that confrontation between Moscow and Washington did trigger the split of the Korean nation. However, it is also stressed that at the time of the liberation in 1945 Koreans were sharply divided themselves and opposing sides concentrated accordingly in the North and

the South.<sup>2</sup> Some authors of this group put the domestic Korean factor ahead of international influences as the cause of the split. Anatoly Torkunov writes, the division of Korea was the result of the rift between leftists and conservatives inside the Korean society, “maintained and promulgated by the military administrations of the USSR and the United States, whose relations acquired an increasingly confrontational character.”<sup>3</sup>

Communist and nationalist writers see Korean history in a completely different light, denying any wrongdoing on the part of the USSR and their North Korean allies. They maintain that the division of Korea was the product of nothing else but “imperialist policies of the United States and intrigues of their South Korean stooges.”<sup>4</sup> They also accuse Seoul and Washington of instigating the Korean War, refusing to accept the blame given to Kim Il-sung for the bloodshed.<sup>5</sup> In contrast to the criticisms of Stalin and Kim common a decade earlier, Stalin is also credited for the approval of Kim’s aggressive designs and then using the protracted warfare in Korea as leverage in the global rivalry with the United States. Refutations of these views are less common now, as centrists, mostly for diplomatic reasons, avoid the Korean War altogether or blur it to such a degree that it is impossible to understand from their writings how it arose. Clashing views of history set the background for contrasting views of the nuclear crisis.

Regardless of the differences, there is generally consensus on the need not to repeat the errors of Russian policy during Yeltsin’s first term as president. A special report on the North Korean problem prepared by former Soviet President Michael Gorbachev and a group of leading experts lists the following negative consequences of the Yeltsin-Kozyrev line: The role of Russia in the complicated knot of the Korean settlement decreased; the Russian factor lost its value in

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<sup>1</sup> Igor Ivanov, *Novaia rossiiskaia diplomatiia* (Moscow: OLMA-PRESS, 2001), pp. 158-59.

<sup>2</sup> *Rossii i mezhkoreiskie otnosheniia: Itogovyi doklad* (Moscow: Gorbachev-Foundation, 2003), pp. 5-10.

<sup>3</sup> Anatoly Torkunov, “Koreiskii vopros,” *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn’*, No. 5 (2003), p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> *Pravda*, June 25, 2003, p.3.

the eyes of South Koreans; and decline of Russian-North Korean ties had a bad impact on the foreign and domestic policies of the DPRK.” It added that, “Even fragile hopes of democratization, connected with the change of the leader in North Korea, did not materialize. And many countries began to actively promote relations with the DPRK... Even the United States and Japan opened direct contacts with North Korea... Russia was progressively pushed to the fringes of these processes losing not only political, but also economic positions in the country.” In turn, Putin’s balanced policy in Korea is characterized as “adequate to the tasks of strengthening peace, security and cooperation in the region as well as to the future peaceful, democratic unification of Korean peninsula.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Russian Interests in Korea**

Centrists, communists and nationalists insist on the importance of ties with the DPRK, but for different reasons. Centrists support Putin’s balanced line as pragmatic and realistic. They believe it enhances Russian security, given the potential danger of renewed hostilities on the peninsula. Since the North Korean regime is unlikely to collapse soon and its collapse might actually create even greater security risks, it is deemed important that Moscow resume an active role, including improved relations with the DPRK and a more balanced policy on the peninsula.

“Without normal, good-neighbourly relations with the DPRK (no matter how the socio-political regime of this clone of the Soviet system is appraised in Russia), without taking into account its legitimate interests, interactions with it not only in bilateral affairs, but also at the international arena, Russia’s national interests will be damaged while stability in our border

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<sup>5</sup> *Rossiia i mezhkoreiskie otnosheniia*, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-42.

region will not get strengthened.”<sup>7</sup> Others take the argument further. Restoration of links with North Korea is justified on the grounds that Moscow created Kim Il-sung’s regime and spent much time and money nourishing it and that, while leaders come and go, people’s memories and friendship endure. A pro-North lobby, consisting of military men, diplomats, scholars, and former technical advisers to Pyongyang, advances such a thesis. Most communist-leaning authors in principle don’t object to Russia’s cooperation with the South. However, they feel that not enough is done to restore close friendship with the North which is seen as “our country”. They insist on such closeness because of historical and spiritual feelings, as a moral obligation and as a rebuff to American hegemonism.<sup>8</sup> For nationalists the last argument is in fact the critical one: to use North Korea as an instrument in resisting U.S. dominance in world affairs.<sup>9</sup>

These feelings are reinforced by the envy of American activities in Korea. In the 1990s it seemed that the United States was winning over Moscow’s ally to the American side: the attempts of the North to sign a peace treaty exclusively with the United States, the Seoul-Washington proposal on 4-power peace talks, and the cooperation between the DPRK and the United States in the nuclear field. Russian Ambassador to the DPRK Valerii Denisov argued that the United States was undertaking a broad offensive irrespective of Russian interests aiming at expanding its influence over the North in order to become the sole master of Korea’s destiny.<sup>10</sup> He stressed that an active Moscow did not coincide with American national interests.<sup>11</sup> Russians observed too that the United States continued its security links with the ROK and still dominated this ally, while Russia’s prestige and influence in the ROK had diminished precisely because of the weakening of Moscow’s position in the North. While Seoul had sought Moscow’s help

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<sup>7</sup> G.Toloraya, “Koreiskii poluostrov i Rossiia,” *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn’*, No. 4 (2002), p. 65.

<sup>8</sup> *Pravda*, May 10, 2004, p.5.

<sup>9</sup> *Zavtra*, February 12, 2004, p.2.

<sup>10</sup> Valerii Denisov, “Rossiia na Koreiskom poluostrove,” *Segodnia*, November 4, 1994, p. 4.

because of its influence over Pyongyang, as soon as the Kremlin and the Blue House formalized mutual relations it had begun to pressure Moscow against the continuation of military and other aid to the DPRK. When Russia did downgrade its cooperation with the North, the South, instead of being satisfied, lost respect for the Kremlin. Clearly, improved relations with the DPRK would help to restore Russian credibility.<sup>12</sup> A deterioration of relations with the DPRK had “limited Russia’s possibilities to positively influence developments in the immediate neighborhood of its borders.”<sup>13</sup>

Economic considerations are another motive for Russia’s activities in the region. South Korea continues to figure prominently among prospective partners; however, its role as an economic partner has been disappointing due to low investment activities of ROK companies in Russia and problems with loans and credits. Moscow also recognizes that the only way to get North Korean debts back is to smooth tensions with it. Russia may someday participate in the modernization of the numerous Soviet-built enterprises in the DPRK. Deliveries of nuclear reactors to the North and involvement in the development of the free economic zones in the border areas are among the economic aims of Russia vis-a-vis North Korea.<sup>14</sup> Another argument is that only together with the DPRK would it be possible to realize large-scale Russian-South Korean projects, such as a gas pipeline to the ROK and a trans-Eurasian railroad.<sup>15</sup> Even if many recognize that Russia’s economic policies have been disorganized and not encouraging for

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<sup>11</sup> Valerii Denisov, “Otluchenie ot integratsii,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, August 26, 1994, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Materiali Seminara “Koreia segodnya”* (Moscow: Nauchnaia kniga, 2003), pp. 44-45.

<sup>13</sup> Anatoly Torkunov (ed.), *Istoriia Korei* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2003), pp. 394-97.

<sup>14</sup> Natalia Bazhanova, *Ekonomika KNDR* (Moscow: Diplomaticheskaiia akademiia, 2004), p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, November 10, 2004, pp. 5-7.



economic interactions with neighboring states in the East,<sup>16</sup> they appreciate that integration into Northeast Asia is a prerequisite for economic development in Russia's Far East.<sup>17</sup>

Special value is attached to the project to rebuild the Trans-Korean railroad and connect it to the Trans-Siberian line. The powerful Ministry of Communications lobbied aggressively for the project with support from public opinion. It stressed that the new railroad will not only bring significant economic benefits by creating a cheaper and faster alternative to delivering freight from South Korea to Russia and Europe, but it will also become an important factor in regional stability and promote rapprochement between the two Koreas.<sup>18</sup> There were, however, experts and journalists who cautioned right from the start against "excessive optimism" concerning the railroad project, citing economic troubles of the DPRK and the fear of its leadership of a large foreign presence in the country.<sup>19</sup> A bimonthly, specializing in Korean affairs, *Forum* argued in its editorial that the Trans-Korean railroad project, no matter how profitable, "presents a threat" to the North Korean regime. The journal concludes that it is for this reason that the project as well as the free economic zones in the North "don't really go ahead."<sup>20</sup>

## **Russia and North Korea**

The overwhelming majority of Russian observers hold a very pessimistic view of the internal situation in the DPRK. One of the most sympathetic to North Korea and cautious among leading orientologists Vadim Tkachenko of the Institute of Far Eastern studies admits: "North Korea is undergoing an extended systematic crisis, facing serious challenges in all spheres of life

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<sup>16</sup> A.Fedorovsky, "Severo-Vostochnaia Aziia v sovremennoi vneshnei politike Rossii," *Forum*, Nos. 5-6 (2004), pp. 54-57.

<sup>17</sup> *Rossia i mezhkoreiskie otnosheniia*, p. 71.

<sup>18</sup> Leonid Ionin, "Koreiskie dorogi", *Segodnia*, July 20, 2003, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Yulia Latinina, "O sportsmenakh, kormchikh i polpredakh," *Novaia gazeta*, July 22-24, 2002, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Forum*, Nos. 5-6 (2004), p. 101.

comparable only with the Korean war of 1950-1953.”<sup>21</sup> Tkachenko tends to explain these troubles in part by pressures and intrigues of outside powers and offers some hope that current “experiments” by Kim Jong-il’s regime may lead to more meaningful and successful steps in the economic reforms and eventually democratization of the social life.<sup>22</sup> Another researcher, sympathetic to the DPRK, Alexander Vorontsov argues that Kim Jong-il has indeed realized the necessity of veritable economic reforms and begun them in July 2002, a process that may be interrupted only because of the tough U.S. policy “aimed at the removal of Kim Jong-il’s regime.”<sup>23</sup>

Many are more pessimistic.<sup>24</sup> They draw the verdict that this “utterly ineffective, crisis-stricken regime lacks any historic perspective.”<sup>25</sup> Authors of a new comprehensive book *North Korea: The Decline of Kim-Jong-il’s Epoch* write: “The epoch of Kim Jong-il has begun only ten years ago, but it has already created so much sufferings and troubles for North Korean people. Time will come when people realize its arbitrary situation and curse the Kims and their tyrannical regime.”<sup>26</sup> Vasily Mikheev has equally harsh words for the current North Korean regime calling it “an enemy of its own people” whose aim is “to survive at all cost even at the expense of own people.”<sup>27</sup> As many other Russian observers, he describes North Korea’s economic reforms as purely cosmetic. Prospects of successful transformation of the North Korean economy are also appraised as negative, since it is closer to the Soviet (predominance of military-industrial complex) rather than the Chinese model. Consequently, the prediction is made

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<sup>21</sup> Vadim Tkachenko, “O vnutrennei politike KNDR,” *Iadernoe rasprostranenie*, No. 46 (January-March 2003), p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22,33-34.

<sup>23</sup> Alexander Vorontsov, *Krizis vokrug KNDR* (Moscow: IOS RAS, 2003), pp. 15-16.

<sup>24</sup> Georgy Bulychev, “Two Scenarios for North Korea,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (April-June 2003), p.127-29; *Rossiiia i mezhkoreiskie otnosheniia*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>25</sup> *Rossiiia i mezhkoreiskie otnosheniia*, p. 72.

<sup>26</sup> A.Panin and V.Altov, *Severnaia Koreia: epokha Kim Chen Ira na zakate* (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2004), p. 313.

that the regime will eventually collapse, even if reform efforts acquire a genuine character.<sup>28</sup> Yet, these opinions are not popular in many circles. Experts criticize “a certain portion of the Russian elite oriented to the West which cannot and does not want to objectively appraise the significance of the ‘oriental angle’ in the foreign strategy of the country, including the Korean direction.”<sup>29</sup>

Sober communists privately admit excesses in the DPRK and deficiencies in the Pyongyang’s economic policies. As a matter of fact, for most Russian communists the China’s model of socialism is much more appealing.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, officially the strongest group in the parliament, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), continues to praise *juche* ideology and the “great successes” of the DPRK in socialist construction and in pursuing an “independent, proud” foreign policy.<sup>31</sup> Every aspect of North Korean life (including the disastrous economic situation) is defended and, if necessary, covered-up. Some fringe Stalinist sects still picture the DPRK as “the only remaining bastion of true socialism, a beacon showing the way to the future.”<sup>32</sup> The nationalist, anti-western Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR), headed by deputy chairman of the State Duma Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, is also quite eloquent in praising Pyongyang. On frequent trips to North Korea LDPR leaders hail “great achievements” of Kim Jong-il in political, economic and social development of the country.

Pyongyang’s foreign policy has also been interpreted in Russia in different ways. Up to the nuclear crisis in the fall of 2002 the DPRK’s increased contacts with the outside world were

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<sup>27</sup> Vasily Mikheev, “*Koreiskaia problema i vozmozhnosti ee reshenia*,” Carnegie Moscow Center Working Papers, No. 5, 2003, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Vladimir Yakubovskiy, “Economic Relations between Russia and the DPRK,” *Korea and World Affairs* (Spring 2003).

<sup>29</sup> *Kommersant-Daily*, June 16, 2004, p.6.

<sup>30</sup> *Sotsializm segodnia* (Moscow: Veche, 2003), pp. 20-36.

<sup>31</sup> *Pravda*, June 25, 2003, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> *Zavtra*, September 1, 2003, p. 2.

mostly approved in Russia as promising signs of change,<sup>33</sup> however, Pyongyang's announcement of its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty came as a very unpleasant surprise for Moscow and most Russian observers. This step and the following moves by the DPRK such as refusal to cooperate with the IAEA, reactivation of nuclear programs and admission to possessing nuclear weapons were roundly condemned by the mainstream political and academic elites of Russia.<sup>34</sup> The Kremlin received strong internal support for its appeals to North Korea to renounce all weapons of mass destruction programs.<sup>35</sup>

At the same time public opinion in Russia applauded the government's efforts to make Washington assume its share of blame for the failure of the 1994 deal and agree to a peaceful compromise with North Korea. As one observer put it, "the creation of a nuclear-free Korean peninsula is a must, but simultaneously the United States must guarantee the security of the DPRK and help promote favorable conditions for its socio-economic development."<sup>36</sup> Another prominent expert stressed the necessity "to work together with all partners in extending real guarantees of security to the DPRK."<sup>37</sup>

Pro-western liberals give a very different appraisal of the nuclear crisis. Mikheev argues that North Korea for decades has been employing "simple and persistent tactics of intensifying tensions on the peninsula forcing others, first of all Washington and Seoul, to look for ways to resume a dialogue with it. Finally the DPRK enters the dialogue and for this move alone gets economic aid while winning additional political time for the regime's existence."<sup>38</sup> It offers only empty promises. Another researcher develops a similar scenario: "Pyongyang repeatedly invents

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<sup>33</sup> Anatoly Torkunov, ed., *Istoriia Korei*, pp. 388-89, 395-96.

<sup>34</sup> Anatoly Torkunov, "Koreiskii vopros," pp. 69-72.

<sup>35</sup> *Rossiiia i mezhkoreiskie otnosheniia*, p. 45.

<sup>36</sup> Vladimir Orlov, *Iran, Severnaia Koreia i zavtrashnyi den' nerasprostraneniia* (Moscow: PIR-Center, 2004), pp. 7-8.

<sup>37</sup> Anatoly Torkunov, "Koreiskii vopros," p. 73.

<sup>38</sup> Vasily Mikheev, "Koreiskaia problema i vozmozhnosti ee resheniia," p. 6.

various security pretexts to engage the United States and South Korea in a dialogue in order to postpone the collapse of the regime, to promote military programs in a relatively calm environment, to receive economic aid without making any concessions as far as reforms and open-door policy are concerned.”<sup>39</sup> The current crisis, according to such observers, was provoked by Kim Jong-il in order to boost foreign economic aid as well as to diminish a perceived military threat in the wake of the Iraq situation.<sup>40</sup> The aim is to engage the United States in a dialogue and normalize relations with it and on this basis to exchange the nuclear program for economic aid.<sup>41</sup> Pyongyang is accused of a similar tactics toward Tokyo when nuclear and missile threats as well as promises to solve the problem of kidnapped Japanese citizens are used to extract more and more concessions from Japan.<sup>42</sup> China is presumably another target of North Korea’s blackmail. Pyongyang supposedly warns Beijing of an increased flow of refugees from the DPRK unless China increases economic aid.<sup>43</sup> Critics maintain that North Korea has managed to instigate competition among big powers as to who succeeds more in engaging Pyongyang. Both China and Japan were worried at some junctures that Russia was outplaying them in this game.<sup>44</sup>

Some liberals maintain that while the DPRK has had a military nuclear program, it has not yet achieved its goal and does not possess the bomb. Not having an opportunity to conduct a nuclear test and turn itself into a nuclear power, North Korea successfully employs “bluffing”

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<sup>39</sup> Andrei Kaliadin, *Severnaia Koreia i iadernoe oruzhie* (Moscow: IMEMO, 2003), pp. 83-84.

<sup>40</sup> Vladimir Frolov, “Severokoreiskaia raketno-iadernaia programa,” *Iadernoe rasprostranenie*, No. 46 (January-March 2003), pp. 64-69.

<sup>41</sup> Natalia Romashkina, “Severokoreiskaia iadernaia problema,” *Iadernoe rasprostranenie*, No. 46 (January-March 2003), pp. 46-63.

<sup>42</sup> *Kommersant-Daily*, October 22, 2003, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Anatoly Shutov, *Uchenye Zapiski – 2004* (Moscow: Nauchnaia kniga, 2004), pp. 20-21.

<sup>44</sup> Vladimir Frolov, “No More Nuclear Blackmail,” *The Moscow News*, January 16, 2003, p. 8.

tactics as “a political game.”<sup>45</sup> Room for Pyongyang’s maneuvers is ample because of differences among the big powers.<sup>46</sup>

Liberal critics of the Kremlin’s Korea policy insist that it must be geared to the strategic goal of finding a place for Russia in the developing integrated system of Japan, South Korea and increasingly powerful China. Russia’s interest lies in “neutralization of the North Korean destabilizing factor and shift of North Korea in the direction of democratic market reforms and openness,”<sup>47</sup> but the diplomatic activity of Russia “has not led to Pyongyang’s policy becoming more attuned to Moscow’s recommendations.”<sup>48</sup>

Russia is torn between the obligations of a responsible nuclear power and a country which is anxious to maintain good relations with the North. Every time Moscow puts an accent on non-proliferation, it makes Pyongyang unhappy and jeopardizes bilateral relations. To please the partner Russia right from the start began to talk about security guarantees for Pyongyang as if in advance agreeing with it that the United States presents a threat to the DPRK.<sup>49</sup> Bureaucrats in the Foreign Ministry continue to see North Koreans as “almost our people.” Neither the Kremlin nor big business puts pressure on the diplomats to adjust their ways.<sup>50</sup>

On the other side of the political spectrum the CPRF established permanent contacts with Pyongyang, regularly sending to the North high-level delegations. In joint statements and other documents the two sides swear to unite “in the struggle for socialism and against reaction.”<sup>51</sup> Communists and their supporters castigate those who suspect North Korea of military nuclear

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<sup>45</sup> Natalia Gevorkian, “Tsena voprosa,” *Kommersant-Daily*, January 13, 2003, pp. 9, 11.

<sup>46</sup> O. Saakyan, “Nekotorye logicheskie postroeniia v svyazi s iadernoi problemoi Severnoi Korei,” *Forum*, Nos. 5-6 (2004), pp. 29-35.

<sup>47</sup> Vasily Mikheev, “Koreiskaia problema i vozmozhnosti ee resheniia,” p. 13.

<sup>48</sup> *Kommersant-Daily*, January 23, 2003, p.10.

<sup>49</sup> Maxim Gladkii, “Severokoreiskii plan,” *Vremia novostei*, August 20, 2002, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> *Kommersant-Daily*, January 23, 2003, p.10.

<sup>51</sup> E.P.Bazhanov, *Aktual’nye problemy mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii*, Vol. 3 (Moscow: Nauchnaia kniga, 2002), p. 128.

ambitions and aggressive plans.<sup>52</sup> They blame Yeltsin for betraying the DPRK and joining the Western anti-Korean chorus, even demanding increased military cooperation with the North and support of its nuclear program as a contribution to the defense of Russia against Washington and its allies.<sup>53</sup> It must be remembered though that LDPR leaders use such pro-Pyongyang rhetoric simply to receive commercial benefits as well as for publicity to position themselves as champions of nationalism. In reality, they don't hold any admiration for the North Korean regime and accept the Kremlin's line in Korean affairs (as everything else President Putin does).

The prevailing mood in the Russian political elite is to support Putin's decision to overcome "the decade of coolness"<sup>54</sup> in relations with the North. As Alexander Lukin argues, "it is quite clear that the collapse of North Korean regime is inevitable and few must doubt it in the Kremlin... However, it is important for both Koreas and their neighbors when and how such a reunification will occur... The Hungarian or Chinese model of transition would be much more preferable to the Romanian one."<sup>55</sup> Experts agree that it is in Russia's interest "to demonstrate the advantages of the market economy to the North Korean regime and to encourage reformist tendencies within it."<sup>56</sup> It is generally believed that international cooperation that brings in foreign investment and technology provides access to world news, and necessitates foreign travel will stimulate the growth of reformist forces within North Korean society.<sup>57</sup> Consequently recommendations are offered to the Russian government "to use every possibility to promote trade and cooperation of the outside world with the DPRK."<sup>58</sup> Approving the Kremlin's strategy an influential expert writes that "in the interests of economic cooperation and increasing Russia's

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<sup>52</sup> Yuri Vanin, "Ni uma, ni serdtsa," *Pravda*, August 16, 2003, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> E. P. Bazhanov, *Aktualnye problemy mezhdunarodnyh otnoshenii*, vol. 3, p. 129.

<sup>54</sup> This phrase was used by Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov in his book *Novaia Rossiiskaia diplomatiia*, p.158.

<sup>55</sup> Alexander Lukin, "Russian Policy Towards the Korean Peninsula," *The Korean Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Spring-Summer 2003), p. 78.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>57</sup> Andrei Vetvinsky, "Vozhvedenie" *Vremia novostei*, July 8, 2004, pp. 4-9.

role in the region and the international community as a whole it is necessary to continue the policy of reviving traditional ties with Pyongyang and to use them for enhanced security and stability on the peninsula and for stimulation of inter-Korean dialogue.”<sup>59</sup>

The State Duma and leading political circles at large support the pragmatic, flexible approach of Putin to North Korea.<sup>60</sup> The Duma almost unanimously (383 – “for”, 8- “against”, 1 – “abstained”) ratified on July 19, 2002 the new treaty of friendship, good-neighborhood and cooperation between the RF and the DPRK (of February 9, 2000). Russian foreign policy is now formulated and implemented by the executive branch of the government without any serious challenge within the country. The consensus is that Putin – Kim Jong-il meetings “strongly influenced the situation on the Korean peninsula and around it, underlying a positive role of Russia in the region,<sup>61</sup> and that Russia should proceed with its constructive policies vis-a-vis the DPRK thanks to which it “can raise its own role in regional affairs” and help the North when the Stalinist regime shows signs of change.<sup>62</sup> Russians largely approve that Putin is following a balanced policy, non-ideological approach which “does not permit improving relations with one side at the expense of the other side and vice-versa.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> “Rossiisko-koreiskoe ekonomicheskoe sotrudnichestvo,” *Forum*, Nos. 5-6 (2004), pp. 69, 78-80.

<sup>59</sup> M. Trigubenko, “Popitki i perspektivy obnovleniia sotsialisma v KNDR,” *Forum*, 2004, Nos. 1-2, pp. 46-49. See also Ilya Nikitin, “Osvoenie Sibiri,” *Vremia novostei*, August 22, 2002, p. 6.

<sup>60</sup> Andrei Fedorov, “KNDR na starte protsesssa peremen,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, August 21, 2002, p. 5; Alexander Zhebin, “KNDR,” *Forum*, Nos. 1-2, 2004, pp. 29-35.

<sup>61</sup> *Tribuna*, September 10, 2004, p. 5.

<sup>62</sup> *Kommersant-Daily*, November 5, 2004, p. 6.



## Views on the Republic of Korea

With the advent of Kim Dae-jung in 1998 to the South Korean presidency Seoul's policy towards the North became the object of praise in Russia.<sup>64</sup> "Activization of the Russian policy in the North Korean direction, despite some fears and worries of Seoul, fit well with the Kim Dae-jung concept of inter-Korean relations."<sup>65</sup> Observers note that Kim rejected the counterproductive strategy of previous administrations aimed at strangulation and absorption of the DPRK. It is argued that such policy just made the North Korean regime "more obnoxious, more xenophobic, and isolationist, helping to intensify the nuclear and missile programs of Pyongyang and exacerbate the material hardships of North Korean population."<sup>66</sup> The sunshine policy, to the contrary, "creates conditions for a gradual exit of North Korea out of the self-isolation, for its escape from the socio-economic crisis, for bringing closer the levels of development of the South and the North, for promotion between the two sides of economic, humanitarian and later political ties and, finally, for humanization of the North Korean regime." While the sunshine policy does not promise quick breakthroughs, there is no reasonable alternative. If the ROK returns to the old line, it will provoke military conflicts or, so to say «at best», an uncontrollable collapse of the DPRK with the ensuing chaos and shift of the unbearable North Korean burden onto the economy and society of the ROK.<sup>67</sup> South Korea is also regularly praised for its nationalistic, independent stand vis-a-vis the principle ally, the United States, as well as Japan.<sup>68</sup> There is virtually a consensus in the ruling circles of Russia that the ROK is one of the most important Russian neighbors as "a center of regional development, a valuable

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<sup>63</sup> *Tribuna*, September 10, 2004, p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> Vladimir Goudimenko, ed., *Novoe nachalo* (Moscow: Respublika, 1998); Anatoly Torkunov, ed., *Istoriia Korei*, pp. 365-67.

<sup>65</sup> *Rossii i mezhkoreiskie otnosheniia*, p. 43.

<sup>66</sup> Evgeny Bazhanov, ed. *Materialy Seminara "Koreiskaia Problema"* (Moscow; Diplomatic Academy, 2004), pp. 9-10.

<sup>67</sup> Evgeny Bazhanov ed., *Materiali Seminara "Koreiskaia Problema,"* pp. 11, 13-14.

economic partner, a vital link to the overall security in the Far East and as a future regional superpower.”<sup>69</sup> Both sides hold similar or even identical views on inter-Korean relations as well as on regional cooperation and broad international issues.<sup>70</sup> The election of Roh Moo-hyun as president of the ROK was hailed as beneficial to the prospects of bilateral relations.<sup>71</sup>

Russian observers see also internal weaknesses in the Roh administration – its rejection by the political elite, bureaucracy and military circles.<sup>72</sup> Inconsistency in Seoul’s foreign policy is noticed when it vacillates between Washington’s tough line toward Pyongyang and its own attempts to engage the North through concessions and initiatives.<sup>73</sup> On concrete issues Russia is disappointed that the ROK does not show more enthusiasm for such economic projects as the Trans-Korean railroad and modernization of North Korean power stations.<sup>74</sup> While experts assert that the current economic recovery of Russia should give a new stimulus to bilateral cooperation,<sup>75</sup> blame is partly put on the South Korean side for “surely lagging behind European, American, Japanese corporations in tapping business opportunities in the Far East.” South Koreans are warned that “the trailblazers will get the lion’s share of profit and advantages” in the Russian market.<sup>76</sup> Vorontsov concludes that the ROK “is not quite ready yet to fulfill the historical mission of complete national accommodation with the North and to acquire a more independent role in the world arena, adequate to the economic potential of the country.”<sup>77</sup>

The visit of Roh Moo-hyun to Russia in the fall of 2004 helped to alleviate some of the misgivings about the South Korean president. Russian officials found Roh quite reasonable on

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<sup>68</sup> Andrei Lankov, “Antiamerikanizm v Iuzhnoi Koree,” *Forum*, Nos. 1-2 (2004), pp. 71-72.

<sup>69</sup> Russian Foreign Ministry. Press-Release, January 22, 2004.

<sup>70</sup> *Kommersant-Daily*, February 13, 2003, p. 15.

<sup>71</sup> *Forum*, Nos. 5-6, 2004, pp. 12-13; *Kommersant-Daily*, December 20, 2002, p. 8.

<sup>72</sup> Vladimir Sablin, “Koreiskii regionalism: vzgliad iz Moskvi,” *Forum*, Nos. #1-2 (2004), pp. 60-63.

<sup>73</sup> “Editorial,” *Forum*, Nos. 11-12 (2003), pp. 71-73; see also “Editorial,” *Forum*, Nos. 4-5 (2004), p. 14.

<sup>74</sup> “Rossiisko-koreiskoe ekonomicheskoe sotrudnichestvo,” pp. 69-71, 73-76.

<sup>75</sup> *Kommersant-Daily*, June 16, 2004, p. 3.

<sup>76</sup> *Rossia i mezhkoreiskie otnosheniia*. p. 48.

the nuclear issue and enthusiastic concerning promotion of cooperation between the ROK and the RF. Roh's lack of attention to Russia in the initial phrase of his presidency was forgiven. The Kremlin expressed its belief that Russia and South Korea would be cooperating closely in handling the nuclear issue.

### **Washington as the Focus of Russian Attention**

Mainstream Russian observers credit the United States for “having done much for the democratization of South Korean regime and transformation of the ROK into a modern state with a dynamically developing economy.”<sup>78</sup> And yet a majority of Russian analysts have harsh words to say about Bush's policies in Korea. His administration is blamed at least equally with Kim Jong-il for triggering the latest nuclear crisis, and in many cases the blame is put squarely on Washington. Russian observers give the Clinton administration credit for a flexible strategy in Korea arguing that the “positive potential acquired in relations between Washington and Pyongyang during Clinton presidency was ruined” by Bush.<sup>79</sup> The White House “has broken in recent years all obligations to North Korea,” hoping for its early collapse under the weight of economic problems.”<sup>80</sup> Tough rhetoric and actions by the Bush administration led many analysts in Russia to believe, especially in the wake of the swift U.S. occupation of Iraq, that Washington was preparing a military solution of the Korean nuclear crisis.<sup>81</sup>

Various explanations for such American plans were offered. Some thought that “the United States was increasingly looking at Korea through the prism of strategic competition with

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<sup>77</sup> Alexander Vorontsov, “Koreiskii poluostrov,” *Forum*, Nos. 5-6 (2004), p. 41.

<sup>78</sup> Yury Fokine, ed., *The Third Russian-Korean Forum* (Moscow: Nauchnaia kniga, 2002), pp. 9-10, 26-28.

<sup>79</sup> Anatoly Torkunov, “Koreiskii vopros,” p. 71.

<sup>80</sup> Yury Fokine, ed., *The Fifth Russian-Korean Forum* (Moscow: Nauchnaia kniga, 2003), pp. 23-24.

<sup>81</sup> Alexander Mansourov, “North Korea Goes Nuclear, Washington Readies for War, South Korea Holds Key,” *Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network, Special Report*, December 10, 2002.

China in the XXI century.”<sup>82</sup> Others believed that Washington’s stand on Korea was part of its broader, global goals. The authoritative *Diplomatic Yearbook* had the following to say: “By the mid-1990’s the White House put on the agenda the task of transforming all states, including rogue and failed regimes, into the “core” zone, controlled by the United States ... The tragic events of September 11, 2001 intensified further the new “crusade.” Hegemonist and messianic motives were supplemented by the thirst to avenge and firm desire to achieve absolute security for America... Iraq is already checked on the map. There are new “blank spots” to be checked.”<sup>83</sup> U.S. policy was strongly criticized as “useless, impatient, trigger-happy.”<sup>84</sup> Experts advised the Kremlin not to follow the Bush administration in its North Korean policy, and instead to aim at “maintaining a dialogue with Pyongyang based on our own long-term economic and political interests” in coordination with Far Eastern neighbors with whom Russia has to live and cooperate in the future.”<sup>85</sup> The U.S. policy of “pressures and threats,” according to Russian critics, was not supported by the leading actors (China, Japan, Russia, the European Union, and South Korea), all of which preferred “a political solution...based on the reaffirmation of the non-nuclear status of the Korean peninsula, real repudiation by North Korea of its missile-nuclear programs.”<sup>86</sup>

Russian officials and centrist observers were unhappy with U.S. efforts to change Moscow’s approach on the Korean nuclear issue in early 2003 as well as with the White House opposition to Russia’s participation in multilateral talks regarding the issue. There were those in the Russian establishment who favored a tough response to the American “anti-Russian actions” (Vremya novostei, February 26, 2003). However, the overall improvement of Russian-American

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<sup>82</sup> Anatoly Torkunov, “Koreiskii vopros,” p. 69.

<sup>83</sup> Yury Fokine, ed., *Diplomaticheskii ezhegodnik – 2003* (Moscow: Nauchnaia kniga, 2004), pp. 38-39.

<sup>84</sup> Georgii Stepanov, “Sterzhneiia ugroza,” *Izvestiia*, September 25, 2003, p. 5.

<sup>85</sup> *Kommersant-Daily*, June 11, 2003, pp. 9-10.

relations in the wake of the September 2001 terrorist attacks led Putin to a more cautious stance. While showing understanding of U.S. concerns, the Kremlin tried hard to encourage North Korea to be flexible and accommodating.

The Iraqi war reinforced Russia's balancing tactics. Moscow was eager to repair the damage done by this war to its relations with Washington and at the same time to discourage the euphoric superpower from spreading aggressive policies to the Korean peninsula. At the first round of six-party talks in August 2003 the Russian delegate in fact endorsed the U.S. demands to Pyongyang to end its nuclear program in a comprehensive manner as a precondition for aid. At the second round of talks in February 2004 Moscow, feeling that Washington was too inflexible, argued that energy aid must be provided to the DPRK if the United States wanted the North to freeze its nuclear program. At the third round in June 2004 this line was continued.

### **The China Factor**

As far as the Korean problem is concerned, China regularly gets very high marks in Russian political circles and the media. It is noted with satisfaction that Beijing shares similar concerns with Moscow and holds similar positions on the solution to the Korean problem. China is singled out as the most wise and effective participant in the six-party talks. This includes praise for Beijing for its pressure on Pyongyang which finally made it accept negotiations<sup>87</sup>. Chinese pressure is not limited to the nuclear issue but includes "strong recommendations" to stop militarization of economy, reform, and open the country to the outside world.<sup>88</sup>

Analysts debate the extent of Chinese influence on North Korea. Alexander Mansourov, currently working at the Hawaiian Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, writes: "China's

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<sup>86</sup> Svetlana Smirnova, "Ne sozdavai chudovish" *Speznaz Rossii*, August 8, 2003, p. 6.

<sup>87</sup> Sergei Luzhianin, "Vsesilnii Pekin," *Nezavisimaia gazeta – Dipkurier*, June 23, 2003, pp. 6-7.

<sup>88</sup> Alexander Vorontsov, *Krisis vokrug KNDR*, p. 43.

influence in North Korea is grossly misrepresented and exaggerated. In the past five years, Beijing's economic assistance to Pyongyang and the latter's economic dependence on China in terms of food, fertilizers, and monetary remittances declined in both absolute and relative terms. Others note that China's military-technical assistance is sporadic and of questionable value. The DPRK-PRC mutual defense alliance is hollow and on paper only. Controversial cross-border contacts aggravate tensions and increase uncertainty in the overall stressful bilateral relationship.

At present, mutual trust between the leaders of the two countries is badly shaken. Yet, Kim Jong-il does not want to be abandoned by China. Hence, the North Korean manipulations of Chinese sensitivities, which are designed to make China recommit itself to the security and sovereignty of North Korea at the expense of "strategic cooperation" with the United States. Pyongyang skillfully uses the American card and the nuclear card to leave Beijing with no options other than facing either the dreaded six-headed monster of American Scylla or the engulfing terror of nuclear Charybdis."<sup>89</sup> Mansourov does not even exclude "the ultimate risk" for Kim Jong-il becoming the victim of "China-sponsored forced dethronement."<sup>90</sup>

While Mansourov advises Washington not to expect that China has much influence over North Korea, Mikheev sees a lot of value in its position for the United States, stating that though China "still harbors deep inside the fear of getting American troops on its borders," it is "increasingly ready for collective measures aiming at the transformation of North Korean regime."<sup>91</sup> It follows that China will not defend the North Korean regime because of ideological reasons and "it will not support Pyongyang in a war since it is bound to spoil Sino-American

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<sup>89</sup> Alexander Mansourov, "Lip Serving the Great (Sadaejuui)" with an Attitude: North Korea's China Debate," *Forum*, Nos. 1-2 (2004), pp. 11-15.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>91</sup> Vasily Mikheev, "Koreiskaia problema i vozmozhnosti ee resheniia," p. 8.

relations with a global threat to economy and social stability of China.”<sup>92</sup> “To avoid a large-scale humanitarian catastrophe on its northeastern border in case of the DPRK collapse,” Beijing persistently encourages reforms in North Korea and a political settlement of the nuclear crisis.<sup>93</sup>

It seems, however, that such praise of China has internal undertones: pro-westerners try to convince the Kremlin to follow Beijing’s example of readiness to cooperate with the United States vis-à-vis the DPRK. China’s relations with the South are pictured by most Russian authors as an example of wise pragmatism and a success. Jealousy is shown to the fact that Chinese-South Korean trade and mutual investments are much ahead of what has been achieved in Russian-South Korean relations. As one observer argues: “if worse comes to worst, a Chinese blessing for the gradually expanding South Korean protectorate over the Kim clan-run North Korea is better than a Beijing-sponsored military coup in Pyongyang or the PRC-sanctioned, avalanche-style, outright absorption of the DPRK by the ROK.”<sup>94</sup>

A different point of view, however, holds that China “having shed blood for the socialist perspective of North Korea and being moved by great power logic wants to keep the DPRK on its side.”<sup>95</sup> Its advocates play down differences between Beijing and Pyongyang, insisting that China believes in the inevitability of China-style reforms in North Korea.<sup>96</sup>

Clear disagreements exist in the Russian expert community concerning Beijing’s views on Korean unification. Some insist that China does not welcome it since a unified Korea is “capable of growing into a serious political, economic and military factor detrimental to hidden plans of Beijing to dominate in this part of Asia and in the Pacific.”<sup>97</sup> Others feel that China will get more pluses than minuses from Korean unification: settlement of one of the most painful

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<sup>92</sup> Anatoly Shutov, ed., *Uchenye zapiski –2004*, p. 34.

<sup>93</sup> Oleg Bagdamyan, *Koreiskii faktor*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>94</sup> Alexander Mansourov, “‘Lip Serving the Great (Sadaejuu)’ with an Attitude: North Korea’s China Debate”, p. 16.

<sup>95</sup> *Rossiiia i mezhkoreiskie otnosheniia*, p. 59.

tension spots near Chinese borders; brilliant economic prospects of cooperation with the united Korea; and the rise of China's prestige due to its intermediary role in Korean affairs. They argue that China in principle welcomes the unification of Korea, but it is against the collapse of the North Korean regime and is apprehensive about U.S. predominance in the future Korean state.<sup>98</sup>

The Russian and Chinese governments have been closely cooperating regarding the North Korean nuclear crisis. Beijing readily supported Pyongyang's request for Russian participation in the nuclear talks. With Russian encouragement China played an active role as a mediator to bring about the six-party talks (*Trud*, August 22, 2003). Moscow and Beijing held a similar position at the first round of the talks and jointly concluded that the negotiations were useful and resulted in an international framework in which all participants expressed readiness to pursue a peaceful and diplomatic solution to the nuclear crisis (*Izvestiia*, August 31, 2003). The two sides also agreed that Washington's line presented the most formidable hurdle to the resolution of the crisis. Russia and China decided to persuade Kim Jong-il to agree to the second round of six-party talks. The plan worked due to diplomatic pressure and economic "carrots" (including deliveries of fuel oil and foodstuffs to the DPRK). At the second round of talks Moscow and Beijing again coordinated their stands. Both sides pushed for a joint statement of all participants to resolve the nuclear crisis. Washington blocked the statement, refusing to respond to the North Korean demand that the United States change its hostile policy. Finally only a "chairman's statement" was issued. In the wake of the round Russian and Chinese delegates agreed that the road to a settlement remained long and difficult, but it was necessary to continue the effort (**Trud**, March 1, 2004).

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>97</sup> A.V. Torkunov, E.P. Ufimtsev. *Koreiskaia problema: novyi vzgliad* (Moscow: Nauka, 1995), pp. 197-98.

<sup>98</sup> *Rossii i mezhkoreiskie otnosheniia*, pp. 62-63.



Subsequently Russia and China mutually agreed on applying pressure on the DPRK to actively participate in the six-party talks. At the third round of talks (June 2004) Russia and China supported DPRK's right to tap nuclear energy for peaceful purposes under control of the IAEA and adherence to the NPT. After the meeting it was recognized by both sides that the main obstacle in the negotiating process remained a serious lack of mutual trust among the parties (*Vremia novostei*, June 28, 2004).

The new flare-up of the nuclear crisis in February 2005 prompted Moscow and Beijing to further coordinate their positions and moves. Through regular consultations on the issue the two sides worked out a scheme of pacifying Pyongyang as well as convincing Washington not to overreact to the North Korean declaration of its nuclear ambitions (*Izvestiia*, February 14, 2005). The joint Moscow-Beijing strategy can be expected to continue.

### **Appraisals of Japan's Policies**

Russian debaters are neutral in their appraisals of Japan's policies towards Korea. They do note Tokyo's toughness vis-à-vis the DPRK but don't denounce it to the same degree as they do Washington's policies. In fact, certain sympathy is shown to Japanese concerns over Pyongyang nuclear and missiles programs as well as Tokyo's insistence on the resolution of the issue of kidnapped Japanese nationals. It is acknowledged that Japan sees situation on the Korean peninsula as a threat to its security created by militarization of the DPRK and its missile-nuclear programs.<sup>99</sup> Japan, Russian observers admit, is "especially vulnerable" in case of an attack from North Korea, and Tokyo "reacted to the escalation of North Korea's threat by emphasizing the role of military means in the Japanese strategy of national security."<sup>100</sup> To a

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<sup>99</sup> *Rossia i mezhkoreiskie otnosheniia*, p. 66.

<sup>100</sup> Yury Saplin, *Iaponskaia politika v Koree* (Moscow: Nauchnaia kniga, 2004), p. 24.

degree, the North Korean threat also “stimulated rapprochement between Tokyo and Seoul in the military field.”<sup>101</sup> Some observers believe that Japan would be more flexible if Washington set an example. In fact, Tokyo did try to liberalize its policies towards the DPRK, but Washington twisted Japanese hands and made it become tougher on Kim Jong-il.<sup>102</sup>

Japan’s relations with other countries matter too. It is believed that Russia may influence Japan’s position on Korea by advancing projects of regional integration in Northeast Asia through the development of the rich resources of Siberia and the Far East as well as the Korean peninsula.<sup>103</sup> Russian experts pay attention to troubles in Japanese-South Korean relations too, tending to agree with Seoul’s demands for settling “the historical scores” with Tokyo. As experts point out “the hatred syndrome towards their oppressors by the Koreans limits Japan’s opportunities for influence on the Korean peninsula.”<sup>104</sup>

It is also routinely predicted that a unified Korea will present a challenge to Japan both geopolitically and economically, leading to tough competition between the two nations in the future. As a result, Japan is suspected of hidden but firm opposition to the eventual unification of Korea. As the Gorbachev Foundation argues, for Japan to facilitate rapprochement between the two Korean states would mean speeding up the process in which Japan does not play the leading role and may lose ground to a serious challenger in the region.<sup>105</sup> Japan is presumably fearful that a unified Korea will be violently nationalistic, anti-American and anti-Japanese, and will eventually tilt to the Chinese sphere of influence.<sup>106</sup> Of special concern for Japan is the prospect that a “settlement in Korea will weaken American positions in Northeast Asia and the Asian-Pacific region and will put into question the U.S. military presence not only on the Korean

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>102</sup> Fatakh Shodiev, *Vneshnaia politika Iaponii* (Moscow: Nauchnaia kniga, 2001), p. 120.

<sup>103</sup> Anatoly Shutov, ed., *Uchenye zapiski – 2004*, p. 36.

<sup>104</sup> Fatakh Shodiev, *Vneshnaia politika Iaponii*, p. 125.

peninsula, but in the entire region... And Japan needs the military-political alliance with the United States as a guarantee from the threat emanating from the growing military might of the Chinese giant.”<sup>107</sup>

The decision of Koizumi to hold a summit in Pyongyang in September 2002 was welcomed by official Russia as a breakthrough in Tokyo’s pro-American hard line (*Delovoi mir*, October 2002, p.19). However, soon the positive appraisal gave way to a more critical analysis of Japan’s policy. It was noted that the summit where North Korea admitted kidnapping of twelve Japanese nationals in the past created a wave of anti-Korean sentiment and led to a harder stand vis-a-vis Pyongyang. Russian officials as well as centrist and leftist observers were especially dismayed with Japan’s launching of spy satellites over the DPRK and talk of using a preemptive strike to rebuff potential threats. The second Koizumi - Kim Jong-il summit on May 22, 2004 rekindled hope in Moscow of a more flexible Japanese approach to North Korea, and to the on-going nuclear crisis in particular. Yet the following third round of the six-party talks (June 23-26, 2004) disclosed, according to Russian observers, that, unlike Seoul, Tokyo was inclined to follow Washington’s line, a result of Japan’s “unreasonable” preoccupation with the abductees and “strategic ineptness,” Japan presumably feels that it is too weak militarily to be a serious and independent player vis-a-vis North Korea (*Profile*, No. 3, 2005, pp. 22-23).

### **Solving the Nuclear Crisis**

Russian observers point out that three main strategies of solving the current nuclear crisis are contemplated. The first one is physical destruction of the DPRK as an “evil, dangerous and

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<sup>105</sup> *Rossia i mezhkoreiskie otnosheniia*, p. 64.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>107</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, “Iaponskie motivy v Koree,” *Megapolis*, September 10, 2004, p. 9.

inhuman” regime. Virtually all Russian experts as well as the general public are categorically against this kind of strategy. The following arguments have been advanced. North Korea is not perceived as a direct threat to Russia. It was created and groomed by the USSR. Moscow did not like North Korean leaders much, but it always looked at Pyongyang as a poor, weak and frightened regime, not a source of any future attack.<sup>108</sup> Unleashing aggression against the South or Japan equals suicide.<sup>109</sup> Kim Jong-il and his entourage are so cautious that don’t even dare as yet to introduce overdue reforms in the country. A war against formidable foes is much more dangerous than such reforms.<sup>110</sup> A military operation against the North would lead to an uncontrollable, unpredictable course of events. The participation of other great powers cannot be entirely excluded. There is plenty of evidence in the history of mankind when theoretically quick, easy military campaigns turned into nightmares for everyone, even for those who initially did not have anything to do with the conflict. A war in Korea is presented as “a terrible disaster with tragic consequences for all neighboring states.”<sup>111</sup> The war could leave a nuclear cloud hovering over Russian territory, thousands of hungry people fleeing to it, and economic plans for the Russian Far East in ruins.<sup>112</sup> Others noted that an assault on the DPRK would be detrimental to international law and undermine the entire global security system. It would give a cue to weak states: there are no international bodies and norms that can defend them against a military invasion from outside. The weak ones will be tempted to deter potential aggressors with their own WMD. As for strong and ambitious states the signal for them will be: if you have an

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<sup>108</sup> Yury Fokine, ed., *Diplomaticheskii ezhegodnik-2003* (Moscow: Nauchnaia kniga, 2004), pp. 72-85.

<sup>109</sup> *Tribuna*, June 12, 2003, p. 6.

<sup>110</sup> Alexander Timofeev, “Blef v stile chu’che,” *Vremya novostei*, April 24, 2003, p. 5.

<sup>111</sup> *Rossii i mezhkoreiskie otnosheniia*, p. 75; Anatoly Torkunov, “Koreiskii vopros, p. 73.

<sup>112</sup> Pavel Felgengauer, “Koreiskii tupik,” *Novaia gazeta*, June 30 – July 2, 2003, p. 9; Vasilii Golovin, “Voina mozhet nachatsia uzhe oseniu,” *Izvestiia*, June 17, 2003, p. 4.

opponent it is O.K. to use force against it.<sup>113</sup> Russia could not accept “the disturbing wish on the part of Washington to unilaterally establish (or flout) international rules, ignore international law and defy international organizations, especially the UN and its Security Council.”<sup>114</sup> Moreover, tens of thousands of innocent people would be killed supposedly to make life happier in Korea.<sup>115</sup>

The second proposed solution in Korea boils down to strangling the DPRK through pressure and isolation. Russians in general don't support this strategy either. It is argued that there are many countries in the world with regimes not much better than the one in Pyongyang. Yet, the United States and other democratic countries don't mind cooperating with them. So, first of all, Russians don't feel that the DPRK deserves such a harsh treatment.<sup>116</sup> Second, this method is called inhuman. One should not in the name of liberating the North Korean population from the communist yoke starve this very population to death. The elite of the DPRK will anyhow manage to feed itself; it is simple people who are bound to suffer most.<sup>117</sup> Third, the strangulation strategy will not achieve the planned result – the collapse of the communist regime. Instead, Pyongyang would redouble its efforts to produce WMD. Back in the late 1980s the DPRK lost its nuclear ally, the USSR, and faced mounting attempts by Seoul and Washington to speed up the demise of its communist regime. It decided to go nuclear in order to stop potential interference or even outright aggression.<sup>118</sup> Russian observers do not believe in a North Korean Gorbachev either. “The top-level military coup in Pyongyang would rather consolidate the totalitarian regime...North Korean society is much more closed than the Soviet one was.”<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> See Evgeny Bazhanov, *Sovremenni mir* (Contemporary World) (Moscow: Izvestia, 2004), pp. 181-182.

<sup>114</sup> Alexander Lukin, “Russian Policy Towards the Korean Peninsula”, p. 93.

<sup>115</sup> Evgeny Verline, “Kto kogo берет na pushku?” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, October 31, 2002, p. 5.

<sup>116</sup> *Nezavisimaia gazeta--Dipkurier*, May 27, 2002, p. 6.

<sup>117</sup> *Kommersant-Daily*, January 16, 2003, p. 6.

<sup>118</sup> Vladimir Lee, ed., *Krugli stol po Azii* (Moscow: Diplomatic Academy, 2004), pp. 15-17.

<sup>119</sup> *Rossia i mezhkoreiskie otnosheniia*, p. 74.

Even if a strangulation policy did work, the process would start with loosening of control by Pyongyang over the population, decreasing respect for authority, dramatic growth of crime and corruption, open criticism of the leadership by swelling numbers of dissidents, spontaneous local uprisings, struggles in ruling circles for power and over policy issues – all familiar scenes observed in other former communist countries. If South Koreans interceded, the situation could grow even more chaotic. “Attempts to strangle the DPRK may lead to heavy social consequences for the DPRK, to make life even harder for simple Koreans, trigger uncontrollable migration and finally turn into a large-scale military conflict.”<sup>120</sup>

And yet, North Korean insistence on dealing only with Washington on the nuclear issue seemed unreasonable to most Russians. Some argued, “Any possible United States security guarantee to Pyongyang can hardly be worth the paper it is written on... China and Russia are the only countries (which can give Pyongyang formidable security guarantees. Sharing the border with North Korea, Russia and China can effectively prevent U.S. military action in North Korea if they think it is unreasonable and too dangerous.”<sup>121</sup> It follows that Russia “holding such a unique and preferable position may have restraining influence on ideologically-charged approaches of the United States and China towards the North Korean regime.”<sup>122</sup>

Gorbachev-Foundation experts state that Russia does not have any claims “to achieve in Korea dominating positions in the spheres of economy and politics.” It more than the other four powers is interested in the settlement of the Korean problem, including unification of Korea, by peaceful and democratic means.<sup>123</sup> Russia’s basic interest is “to have in the final analysis a united, large democratic state on the Korean peninsula, which will play an important independent

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<sup>120</sup> Anatoly Torkunov, “Koreiskii vopros,” p. 73; Alexander Lukin, “Russian Policy Towards the Korean Peninsula,” p. 93.

<sup>121</sup> Alexander Lukin, “Russian Policy Towards the Korean Peninsula”, p. 94.

<sup>122</sup> Yury Fedorov, *Koreiskaia iadernaia problema* (Moscow: IPMI, 2003), pp. 6-8.

role in the region and will maintain partnership relations with Russia, closely cooperating with it in the spheres of economy and culture, in the development of Far Eastern regions.”<sup>124</sup> An image exists of Russia as “non-partisan and independent, promoting rapprochement of the two Koreas.”<sup>125</sup> Also an image exists of the United States best achieving its aims regarding the DPRK’s nuclear-missiles programs and its totalitarian practices,<sup>126</sup> by convincing Kim Jong-il that America is not about to destroy his regime. The result would be the DPRK abandoning its expensive military programs and moving in the direction of reforms.

It is argued that Russia’s strength in contributing to Korean rapprochement lies in two factors: historical influence on the DPRK and a genuine interest in a strong unified Korean state. Despite recent upheavals in RF-DPRK relations the North Korean leadership looks at Russia with a special feeling as a country which helped to create the DPRK and kept it afloat in the 1950-1980s with massive aid. Putin’s overtures have greatly increased Pyongyang’s trust in Russia. Active participation of Russia in the settlement process will make North Korea more self-assured, less worried about real or imagined threats. It is taken for granted that unlike the communist Soviet Union, present-day democratic Russia will use its influence on the DPRK only for constructive purposes. Inclusion of Moscow will in its turn help to promote economic cooperation of the two Koreas with Russia of great value to both. Economic interests require the ROK to develop new markets for its products, and Russia, whose economy is recovering, may greatly increase imports of South Korean products. As for the North, it desperately needs Russian raw materials. With Moscow as a partner in the settlement negotiations the DPRK will certainly have better access to Russian resources.

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<sup>123</sup> *Rossii i mezhkoreiskie otnosheniia*, p. 68.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

Russia's role in the final stages of the unification process will be even more instrumental than now, Russian analysts assume. When the U.S.-North Korean confrontation deepened at the beginning of 2003, the Kremlin advanced a package deal to reach a compromise. Alexander Losyukov went to Pyongyang with a special message from Putin to Kim Jong-il, presenting a three-points package: 1) a nuclear-free status for the Korean peninsula and strict observance by all the parties of the international agreements, including the 1994 framework accord; 2) a constructive bilateral and multilateral dialogue between the parties, which should result in the granting of security guarantees to the DPRK; and 3) resumption of humanitarian and economic assistance to the DPRK (*Trud*, January 22, 2003). Kim described the Russian initiative as positive and added some elements to it. The proposal provided a reasonable way out of the crisis. Washington, however, held a different view. At first it insisted on 10-party talks, including the five UN Security Council permanent members as well as the two Koreas, Japan, the EU, and Australia. The idea was rejected by Pyongyang. As a result, after Losyukov's visit to the DPRK, Washington called for five-party talks (the United States, the two Koreas, China, and Japan). At that point China intervened suggesting the trilateral meeting (Pyongyang, Washington, Beijing) as a compromise taking into account views in both the United States and the DPRK. Russia was quick to welcome the proposal, noting that "a more limited number of negotiators is preferable at the initial stage; some aspects can be settled by the United States and the DPRK only" (*Nezavisimaia gazeta*, May 8, 2003).

The trilateral talks in China ended in April 2003 not yielding any progress. Washington increased pressure on the North while Beijing did its best to convince Kim Jong-il to resume talks in some format, including a five-party format (two Koreas, the United States, Japan and

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<sup>126</sup> Alexander Mansourov, "Security Dilemma, War Trap, and the South Protectorate over the North," *Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network, Special Report*, February 10, 2002.



China). Russia again demonstrated full flexibility. Foreign Ministry officials encouraged the North to return to the negotiating table (*Nezavisimaia gazeta*, July 10, 2003). Reacting to the Russian appeals, Kim Jong-il instead asked Moscow to join the talks and moreover to host them. Not wishing to get into the center of the controversy, Putin suggested that China continue to be the host. At the same time the Kremlin readily agreed to enter the talks together with five other participants, arguing that such this would help to resume the negotiating process and soften the tough U.S. stance (*Kommersant-Daily*, September 12, 2003). Thus, Moscow helped to alleviate the tensions over the nuclear issue and also scored a diplomatic victory.

Ever since Moscow has pushed for a compromise between Washington and Pyongyang. Together with Beijing, Moscow favors the North Korean approach of compensation for freezing its nuclear program. Russian officials and observers feel that it was due to Moscow and Beijing's insistence that at the third round of the six-party talks Washington finally presented a proposal to settle the controversy. Pyongyang in its turn made a counterproposal, which was welcomed in Moscow as a "small victory" for Russo-Chinese joint diplomacy (*Vremia*, June 28, 2004).

Russia continued its efforts to close the gap between Pyongyang and Washington's positions after the third round of talks. In July 2004 Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and in September 2004 the speaker of the upper chamber of the Russian parliament Sergei Mironov delivered to Kim Jong-il personal messages from President Putin. The thrust of the messages was to urge Pyongyang to accept a compromise solution. Centrist observers welcomed the Kremlin's efforts (*Vremia*, September 30, 2004). The new flare-up in the crisis, precipitated by the DPRK announcement in early February 2005 of its rejection of six-party talks and its possession of nuclear weapons, drew a very negative response in Russia. Both officials and centrist observers, reflecting the official thinking, virtually joined the pro-Westerners in denouncing Pyongyang's behavior. The head of the International Relations Committee of the upper chamber of the

Russian parliament Mikhail Margelov said that “possession of nuclear weapons by the DPRK may pose a threat to the entire mankind...One should not forget,” continued Margelov, “that North Korea is a totalitarian state which demonstrates its desire to remain in isolation” (*Interfax*, February 10, 2005). However, Russian officialdom, including Margelov, once again opted for diplomatic efforts to dispel fears in Pyongyang and convince it to continue negotiating (*Nezavisimaya gazeta*, February 14, 2005).

### **“Roadmap” for the Unification of Korea**

It is only the third strategy towards North Korea that is acceptable for Russia. Its essence is to achieve between the North and the South true peaceful coexistence by engaging the DPRK in intensive contracts with the ROK and the rest of the world and by promoting gradual reforms of the North Korean economy and society. Pyongyang will be responsive to such a flexible strategy. When back in 2000 Kim Jong-il agreed to a summit with Kim Dae-jung he meant business. Pyongyang needed to overcome the cold war heritage in its relations with the South. The DPRK had plunged deep into a chronic economic and social crisis, which could be solved only through an open door policy and internal reforms. The rapprochement with the ROK promised to give the North access to the South’s finances, technology and material goods. It could also help obtain diplomatic recognition and various concessions from the United States as well as attract large-scale economic aid from the entire West. The accommodation on the peninsula had to strengthen the security of the DPRK, which was increasingly difficult to maintain because of economic weakness and expanded military preparations by Washington and its allies.

The inter-Korean détente was very important to Kim Jong-il's regime internally. The top leader had done little to impress associates of his ability to bring the nation to a better future. On the contrary, things went from bad to worse for North Korea. Lack of initiative in the face of mounting difficulties deepened disenchantment among leading figures as well as among wide circles of the population. Kim's decision to reverse the passive foreign policy and to take the bold step of meeting the ROK president brought back an air of optimism in the DPRK. Russians mainly believe Kim was aiming at a real rapprochement with the South and through it long-term engagement with the West balanced by simultaneous reinforcement of ties with China and Russia. It was only the toughening of American policies by the Bush Administration that scared the DPRK back to xenophobia. The underlining motives for a genuine dialogue with the outside world are still valid. The following steps would be favorable for it. One, Four outside powers should equally participate and cooperate with each other in the settlement on the Korean peninsula. Rivalry among these powers and attempts to exclude Russia or any other state among the four from settlement will only slow down or disrupt the process. Two, four outside powers should establish diplomatic relations with the North. The cross-recognition idea on the Korean peninsula was developed by Americans and supported by the ROK and Japan. However after first the USSR and then China established diplomatic relations with the South, Washington and Tokyo did not make similar steps towards the North and set preconditions which Pyongyang must meet before recognition may take place. Three, the four powers should guarantee non-interference in the internal affairs of the North. According to Russian observers the main problem is division of the Korean nation as a result of World War II followed by the cold war. Koreans deserve to be reunited because they constitute "one nation which lived within one state for more than ten centuries and which possesses ancient common cultural-spiritual traditions, language and a unique civilization," a record all the more impressive since Korea was "hundreds

of times invaded from outside and repeatedly and for long periods remained under foreign occupation.”<sup>127</sup>

Throughout all recent debates it has been argued almost unanimously by mainstream observers that Russia should wholeheartedly welcome the tendencies toward normalization on the Korean peninsula and the prospect of the country’s unification. It is pointed out that “normalization would lead to stabilization of the military and political situation on the peninsula for the benefit of Russia’s interests.”<sup>128</sup> Russian also favor the creation of multi-party mechanisms of cooperation and security in Northeast Asia.<sup>129</sup> It is argued that unification of Korea cannot be achieved in the foreseeable future, and the close cooperation of the six countries involved in the six-party talks will be needed for a gradual and long-term process of overcoming animosity between the two states.”<sup>130</sup>

A united Korean state continues to be seen as a strong geopolitical boost for Russian playing the role of a useful counterbalance to Japanese and Chinese influence in the region. One expert asserts, “Many in Russia are concerned with a potential security threat posed by a rapidly developing China. Relations with Japan will remain limited by territorial disputes. A united Korea will become a natural partner of Moscow in off-setting the two Far Eastern giants since their relations will remain burden with historical grievances and present-day competition.”<sup>131</sup> There is also a virtual consensus in the Russian expert community that “in a united Korea Russia will have a larger and a more active economic partner and investor which Russia needs especially in its Far Eastern regions.”<sup>132</sup> Many concerned with U.S. predominance in the world express hope that “a larger united Korea facing no permanent and direct military threat will

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<sup>127</sup> Anatoly Torkunov, “Koreiskii vopros,” p. 61.

<sup>128</sup> Vladimir Lee, ed, *Krugli stol po Azii*, p. 20.

<sup>129</sup> *Rossiiia i mezhkoreiskie otnosheniia*. pp. 76-77.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

adopt a more self-confident foreign policy thus reducing the American military role on the peninsula.”<sup>133</sup> More pragmatic observers, however, reason that “the leading role of the United States in the contemporary world and the fact that Korea’s neighbors are much stronger and populous than the two Korean states put together will stimulate future cooperation between a united Korea and Washington.”<sup>134</sup>

Summarizing the views expressed by various Russian observers the following common points in their arguments can be identified. Russia, unlike other big powers, has absolutely nothing to lose in case of unification of the Korean nation. A strong Korea will not pose a security, political, or economic challenge to Russia (as it will to Japan and China). Instead a unified Korean state will help Moscow to balance the two. Moscow can expect Korean support in its conflicts with other neighbors (for example, territorial disputes with Japan). Specifically, Russians essentially agree on the following points.

- Development of the coastal sector of Russia's Siberia is a major national objective. But such a development cannot be realized without peace in Korea.
- In the development of Siberia and its coastal areas Russia needs Korean participation and collaboration. This in turn necessitates the unification of Korea.
- Stability and international cooperation in the neighboring areas are necessary for Russia's development.
- A security benefit can be envisioned by the buildup of a Northeast Asian regional security system. East Asia needs such a common security tool to resolve various conflicts.

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<sup>131</sup> Alexander Lukin, “Russian Policy Towards the Korean Peninsula,” p. 95.

<sup>132</sup> Vladimir Lee, ed., *Krugli stol po Azii*, p. 23.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

Another set of broadly shared views centers on how the process of engagement of North Korea should unfold. First, should come assistance to the DPRK in acquiring a sense of security and international acceptance, a kind of appeasement involving: 1) full normalization of relations of the United States and Japan with North Korea; 2) thorough implementation of the nuclear accord between Washington and Pyongyang; and 3) unilateral moves by the United States aimed at reducing its level of military activity and presence on the Korean peninsula, such as cancellation of any major joint American-South war games.

Of course, most of these proposals may sound counterproductive. One can argue that, if implemented, they will make the present Stalinist regime in the North stronger and will prolong its lifetime. I don't think so. To the contrary, friendly treatment of the North by the South and the international community will induce changes in North Korean society. Reform-minded people in the upper layers of the DPRK establishment will gain powerful support in their quest for regime transformation. Hardliners will find it more and more difficult to resist.

The second stage of the settlement in Korea must be devoted to the creation of the proper infrastructure of North-South ties. The most important feature is development of large-scale economic cooperation of South Korea, the United States, Japan and other countries with the DPRK. It will not only raise confidence in Pyongyang toward its traditional adversaries and help to change North Korean society; it will also make the economies of the two parts of Korea more compatible and ready for merger. The stronger the DPRK's economy is the easier the burden of unification will be for the ROK. Cultural exchanges should follow closely economic interactions. If such contacts work, then military proposals can be revived and fulfilled.

The third stage should produce intensified cooperation between the two parts of the Korean nation, in the sphere of economy. Joint ventures may be supplemented with equal right for activities of northern and southern capital throughout Korea, and free movement of funds,

goods, and technology across the 38th parallel. Professors, students and various professionals will be freely exchanged. Seoul and Pyongyang will accord official diplomatic recognition to each other; a network of relations between executive and legislative branches of government will be established. The two sides will sign a peace treaty and the existing military arrangements in Korea and the whole Far East will be replaced with a new appropriate system. Political collaboration of the two Koreas in the international arena may become a reality.

The fourth and final stage of the integration-unification process can start only when North Korean society is substantially, even drastically, different from its present state. The DPRK should have a rather developed hybrid market economy, relatively open society, the supremacy of law in the society, a transparent military system, a reformist-minded, responsible and predictable government. Considering the fact that the North Korean economy is relatively small in size, that the country possesses high-quality and cheap labor as well as abundant natural resources and a developed industrial base, the North can quickly achieve economic progress while liberalizing its political system. Of course, South Korea should also by that time move further down the road of democratization. That's when talks can start on establishment of a confederation, then federation and finally a unified state of Korea.

Koreans should not set goals to achieve unification by a certain date, but rather prepare for a long, slow period of mutual accommodation of the North and the South. Russia may be very helpful in this final transition period when North Koreans will have to adjust to new economic, political and social realities. It is clear that immediately after unification most North Korean plants and factories will lose their usefulness and stop. Russia can in such a case become instrumental in modernizing those plants and factories since most of them had been built by Soviets and according to their designs. After that Russia will become the principal consumer of the output of these enterprises. At the same time Russia will be the only country able and

interested to absorb the North Korean work force left without jobs (due to the difficulties with the old economic system). Millions will be looking for suitable jobs and the Russian Far East will be prepared to take them all. Russia will also become a major supplier of spare parts for North Korean enterprises. (They are needed now, but Pyongyang does not have money to buy them). Russia will be the cheapest and the most convenient exporter of oil, gas, and electricity to the northern part of Korea.

Moscow may be useful as well in: developing railroad links between Korean peninsula and Europe; surveys of mineral deposits in the North (Russia has in its possession large quantities of data based on surveys done in the 1950s); reeducation of North Korean workers; teaching North Korean students; modernizing the armed forces of the North; buying agricultural products; developing special economic zones; and supporting unified Korea in its dealings with Japan and China (where problems can crop up). After the transition period is over, Russia and unified Korea may become mutually beneficial partners in the Far East politically, economically, and strategically.

The only serious exception to the above mainstream thinking in Russia on Korea are the views of pro-Westerners. The main thrust of their thinking is to achieve unity of all five players on the Korean peninsula as to the strategy of dealing with Pyongyang by drawing closer to the U.S. outlook. Known in Russia as “radicals,” these persons call upon Russian authorities to shed in Korea the remnants of old political thinking and realize that ideologically, politically, economically, and historically the future belongs to the model established in South Korea. As for the DPRK it will certainly collapse, the sooner the better, and it is high time for all interested parties to join efforts in bringing such collapse about. The transition period is seen as a kind of trusteeship of South Korea over North Korea, when South Koreans teach their brethren to live in



an open, competitive society.<sup>135</sup> The argument of divergent interests of great powers in Korea is dismissed as reflecting the logic of the cold war, since the long-term interests of all of them really coincide.<sup>136</sup>

While some in the United States may want to encourage these views in support of regime change, the reality is that Russian specialists, media, and politicians have a decidedly different outlook. It is their thinking in line with that of Vladimir Putin and the Foreign Ministry that must be taken seriously in planning in the other five states active in the six-party talks.

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<sup>135</sup> Vasily Mikheev, "Koreiskaia problema i vozmozhnosti ee resheniia," p. 10.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.