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9-1-1994

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RUSSIAN POLICY AND THE KOREAN CRISIS

Stephen J. Blank

September 30, 1994

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FOREWORD

North Korea's nuclear program is the greatest current threat to U.S. and Northeast Asian security. The outcome of negotiations over this program will have a tremendous impact on the future of the Korean peninsula and on the vital interests of the United States and neighboring states to North and South Korea: China, Japan, and Russia. Bearing this in mind, the Center for Strategic and International Studies convened a conference on June 28-29, 1994, to consider the crisis surrounding North Korea's nuclear program in its international context. Experts spoke about the program and its impact on the two Koreas and on the neighboring states. Professor Stephen Blank presented this paper on Russian policy with regard to Korea.

Dr. Blank relates Moscow's position on the issues of North Korean nuclearization to the broader domestic debate in Russia over security policy, in general, and Asian policy, in particular. He contends that Russia's policy is a function of that broader debate and must be understood in that context. The Strategic Studies Institute is publishing the paper as a contribution to the understanding of the current Korean crisis and of Russian security policy, particularly in Asia, but also in the context of its overall formulation.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

STEPHEN J. BLANK has been an Associate Professor of Russian/Soviet Affairs at the Strategic Studies Institute since 1989. Prior to this appointment, Dr. Blank was Associate Professor for Soviet Studies at the Center for Aerospace Doctrine, Research, and Education of Air University at Maxwell Air Force Base. Dr. Blank's M.A. and Ph.D. are in Russian history from the University of Chicago. He has published numerous articles on Soviet military and foreign policies, notably in the Third World, and is the author of a forthcoming study of the Soviet Commissariat of Nationalities and editor of books on Soviet foreign policies in Latin America and on the future of the Soviet military.

SUMMARY

The crisis ignited by North Korea's nuclear program affects Russia's vital interests. To understand Russian policy in this crisis, we must refer to both those vital geopolitical interests and to the contemporary and bitter domestic debate over Russian policy abroad.

In strategic terms, Russia has fought three wars in or around Korea in this century and a peaceful Korea is an essential aspect of Russian Asian policy. Russia also is determined to remind the world that its vital interests in Asia must not be ignored. It fears the breakdown of the nonproliferation regime and also regards friendship with South Korea as an essential aspect of its Asian policy. Therefore its interests point to support for nonproliferation by the North.

However, Russian objectives go far beyond this. Russia is still stalemated in its relations with Japan and cooperation over Korea between the two states is unlikely given their very disparate interests. Thus, prospects for Russia's proposed 10 power conference (including both Koreas, the five members of the Security Council, Japan, the UN, and International Atomic Energy Agency) are doubtful since a breakdown between at least these two members is likely to occur quite soon. In addition, Russian foreign policy is now a "victim" of the bitter domestic struggle that characterizes Russian politics. The government does not speak with a single voice due to this struggle and it has had to make numerous concessions to the partisans of a rather militarized policy perspective toward Asia.

This line of thought is now ascendant in Russian policy. If one examines Russian policy in detail one finds an unwillingness to accept that North Korea has nuclear weapons or may have them soon, a military unconcern over that fact except for its impact on Japanese and South Korean defense planning, and a desire to regain leverage over North Korean policy to replace what was lost by Russia's unilateral renunciation of its 1961 treaty with North Korea. There is very clearly a right-wing bloc of support in the Parliament and in the military-industrial complex (MIC) for resuming ties with the North Koreans in the belief that Russia can then sell them arms and resume profitable economic exchanges. Thus the military press alleges that the whole crisis has been "cooked up" by Washington and Pyongyang for domestic purposes.

These groups also want Russia to come close to China's position which consistently has been more solicitous of North Korea's interests and perceptions than President Yeltsin's and Foreign Minister Kozyrev's have been. The MIC also seeks to usurp control of foreign policy from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and to push a line at the conference whose aim is the retreat of American military power from the North Pacific and South Korea. It is very unlikely that these objectives either comport with U.S. goals or those of South Korea. Certainly they do not

harmonize with Japanese interests. The Russian conference proposal and its suggested agenda of neutralizing Korea and denuclearizing the surrounding North Pacific area evoke old objectives dating back to Brezhnev and reflect a primarily military orientation to the regional security agenda.

An equally important goal of the Russian proposal is that it lead the way to a general acceptance of the importance Russia has for the region, even though it can barely compete there now and has lost much of the goodwill Gorbachev won for it. Certainly there is a considerable disillusionment with Russia in South Korea, especially among business and economic institutions. This proposed conference is seen as a way to recoup Russia's diminished standing in Asia and prove it is still important there. This leads the Russian government to advance long-standing proposals whose relevance to the problem at hand is questionable and whose main purpose is to scale down American power and presence in Asia. For all these reasons the Russian proposal is not particularly helpful or useful to the United States. Indeed, Russian policy represents a significant backtracking from the 1991-93 period when Yeltsin pushed forward the rapprochement with the South and repudiated past arrangements with the North. The pressure to sell arms to both North and South or use arms to reduce the debt to the South indicates the degree to which Russia has failed to advance a nonmilitary agenda in Asia or contribute to Asian security.

Finally, Russia's policy position here reflects the difficulty involved in trying to build Asian security systems above diverse regional subsystems and establish a viable arms control regime at a time when individual states like Russia, China, and Japan, tend to go their own way on this and other issues. In this sense Russia's position on Korean nuclearization and ultimately on the destiny of the two states on the Korean peninsula reflects a deeper Asian tendency. Russian policy on Korea shows us how difficult it will be to construct a Russia that can contribute to Asian security and stability and an Asia that can welcome a reformed Russia into its midst.

RUSSIAN POLICY AND THE KOREAN CRISIS

To understand Russian policies and objectives in the current Korean crisis we must refer to both Russian geopolitical imperatives and to the domestic factors impinging upon today's Russian foreign policy process. It is relatively easy to describe the geopolitical factors. In this century, Russian forces have thrice fought in or for Korea. Today a tranquil, nonnuclear Korea is as vital, if not more vital, than before. Peaceful political settlement of outstanding issues on the Korean Peninsula allows Russia to conduct its traumatic economic and political reconstruction in a peaceful Asia without diverting funds that it does not have to military spending. In Korea's case, peaceful political settlement also lets Russia improve relations with South Korea, which is fast becoming its valued regional partner. This partnership is particularly important to Russia's Far Eastern or Maritime Provinces and to Siberia. That friendship, as a recent Russian-South Korean summit in Moscow confirmed, is vital to Russia because it also gives Seoul reason to see Russia as a necessary interlocutor on Korean issues.¹

Securing this foreign estimate, that Russia is objectively a leading player in Asia, is the fundamental political objective of Russia's current Asian policy.² It is only by addressing military and political issues through friendship with South Korea that Russia can achieve this status because it is virtually incapable of serious military action in Asia and its economy and trade are not commensurate with its potential there.

Friendship with South Korea also enables Russia to check North Korean behavior. President Yeltsin and other policymakers have already denounced the 1961 treaty with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), stated that they would not renew it, and that they now understand it to mean that they would only support the DPRK against an unprovoked attack, a most unlikely scenario.³ Since its unilateral renunciation of this treaty in 1991-92, Moscow has forfeited its former leverage on the North. Today it can only exercise an indirect leverage on Pyongyang through this friendship, though it clearly now seeks to redress that balance.

Russia uses friendship with South Korea to show Japan what it loses by not normalizing relations with Russia and that Russia does not need Japan. This is probably a very shortsighted view, but nonetheless it is current in policymaking circles.⁴ In addition, by all accounts, Russia and China see eye to eye on major Asian security issues, Korea among them.⁵ One of those points is a good working relationship with South Korea precisely because it offers increasing economic benefits to both states. Sino-Russian accord also restrains North Korea from dragging them into a crisis to save itself or from playing them off against the other, a habitual DPRK tactic.

Lastly there is the geopolitical issue of nonproliferation.

Countless Russian spokesmen reiterate that they regard this specter as a major and not so distant threat, especially to Russia's Muslim South. For example, if North Korea provided Iran with nuclear weapons, that would substantially aggravate the region's already volatile conditions. Also, if the North already has a nuclear capability, it could conceivably (although the prospect is remote) use it against Russia, or if it is used elsewhere, Russia could be severely affected by the fallout. If U.S. intelligence reports about the Nodong missile system are true, North Korea may be on its way to an IRBM capability that could also conceivably target Russian assets.⁶

For these reasons, and because there has long been little love lost between Moscow and Pyongyang, a consensus exists that the Korean Peninsula should solve its political problems and approach ultimate unification through negotiation; that Russia should use this opportunity to promote its own standing in Asia through President Yeltsin's proposed 10 power conference (both Koreas, the five members of the Security Council, Japan, the UN, and the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA]); and that North Korean proliferation poses risks to Russia.⁷ Moreover, there is the desire to prevent a war from breaking out there in order to maintain close harmony and even alliance (Foreign Minister Kozyrev's word) with China and promote the burgeoning ties with South Korea. More to the point, Russia fears that war might force it to take a stand or commit itself to intensified military activity, two thoroughly unpalatable options. However, it is not likely this conference will take place since all of the other participants reject the idea.

The Russian Policy Process.

However, this consensus and seemingly benevolent posture in the crisis is hardly the whole story. To believe that this represents the sum total of Russian regional objectives would be misleading. While Yeltsin supports unification through peaceful means, and that North Korea open itself up to IAEA inspection, Russian policy is more conflicted than this effort to safeguard traditional Russian interests would indicate.

For example, Russian policy towards Japan is stalemated in an adamant refusal to negotiate the status of the Kurile Islands, the precondition for normalizing Russo-Japanese relations. On May 28, 1994, *Izvestiia* reported that there are no politicians in Yeltsin's entourage, beginning with Premier Chernomyrdin, who are ready to fulfill the provisions of the 1956 treaty with Japan that called for renouncing the two southernmost islands. Japan stubbornly rejects Russia's inclusion in the G-7 and ex-Foreign Minister Watanabe has confessed that he does not understand what happens in Russian policy from week to week. Meanwhile, "The top Moscow leadership has lost interest in political talks with Japan. The level of diplomacy has fallen to that of Poland."⁸

For the Korean crisis this situation means that Russia and Japan have little or nothing to say to each other. This also was the conclusion of a National Defense University political-military simulation of 1992 where the author led the Russian team. The Russian and Japanese teams, in discussing their actions in the event of a nonnuclear crisis, found that neither side had much to say to the other. In practical terms this means that the projected 10 power conference almost certainly guarantees a stalemate from the start, especially as Russia intends for it to become the vehicle for a broader effort to achieve collective security for Asia. Thus the conference would not be confined to the nuclear issues or even just Korean security, but would be the basis for legitimating Russia as one of those with a *droit de regard* for all Asia.⁹ If Russia cannot compose its relations with Japan or deal with them seriously, there is little prospect that its initiative could truly resolve the outstanding issues in the Korean Peninsula or broader regional security. While this stalemate in Russo-Japanese relations is equally due to Japan's long-term political crisis, inflexibility, and timid diplomacy, it also owes much to the problems affecting Russian foreign policymaking in general and Asian policy in particular.

As Suzanne Crow recently wrote, the domestic conflicts over Russia's general foreign policymaking relate to both procedural and substantive issues that have made foreign policy a "victim" of domestic politics.¹⁰ Foreign policymaking is characterized by the following aspects of policy strife:

- No standard procedure or institutional basis for formulating foreign policy exists as yet. Since there is no institutional hierarchy, all players: rival ministries, the Security Council, legislature, the president's and the premier's personal administrations can expect to express their views and have them heeded even if they are voiced out of turn and context.¹¹

- Confusion over foreign policy decisionmaking also resides in the struggle between the executive and the legislature. Not only is the executive internally divided, there also is substantive inter-branch discord on the fundamental rules of the game. Because there is frankly no rule of law, this absence of legal constraint creates a free-for-all. Any player can attack anyone else in the struggle for foreign, defense, or overall security policy. This struggle also characterizes the issue of arms sales, which is also a free-for-all among rival and poorly controlled institutions which show no hesitation in flouting the law. Thus, Russia is trying vainly to sell South Korea arms in return for debt that it cannot repay, even as its elites openly talk of resuming arms sales to the DPRK.¹²

- Foreign policymaking is further complicated by the intense deep-seated discord in Russian society and among elites over what general and specific regional policies should be. All accounts of late Soviet and Russian Asian policy concede that intense

battles, including ones over Korean issues, took place, and still occur.¹³ The vocal debates over fundamental issues betray a society and state that have lost an empire and not yet found a role or ideology appropriate to their new circumstances. This "shouting" makes for an uncertain, even confused policy abroad.¹⁴ This conflict in policymaking cannot be explained, according to Crow, by the bureaucratic method beloved of U.S. analysts and policymakers. As she rightly points out, because there is no true rule of law, the ground rules for such conflicts that postulate bureaucratic and inter-branch interaction do not exist. Second, the debaters over foreign policy are not necessarily or exclusively guided by institutional interests, such as increasing a ministry's turf and budget. Rather there are fundamental ideological cleavages over national identity and interest.¹⁵

- Another factor making the nature of Russian policy uncertain is Yeltsin's habit of personally taking a line that does not coincide with his ministries or that they are actually unaware of. The flaps over bases abroad and over NATO membership for Poland, as well as the cancellation of two trips to Japan, all show a president ready to intervene in foreign policy on behalf of his own opinions and perceptions. As Crow observes, "Some of Russia's diplomatic moves have conveyed the impression that Yeltsin is very much in charge of Russian foreign policy and feels unfettered by his advisers and bureaucracy in Moscow."¹⁶ This sense of being unfettered is both cause and effect of the absence of the rule of law and the resort to quasi-constitutional and quasi-Tsarist modes of government reminiscent of the late Tsarist period, especially 1905-17.¹⁷ Though Yeltsin has periodically decreed supposedly legal regulations upon the confusion in the policy process, the decrees paradoxically promoted this confusion and inter-institutional rivalry.¹⁸

Russia's Policy Process and Asian Policy.

This excursion into the basis for Russian policymaking is essential to understand Russian policy and objectives in the current Korean crisis. Behind the support for a 10 power conference, peaceful reunification of North and South Korea, renunciation of the 1961 treaty, friendship with South Korea, and compliance with the IAEA's inspection requirements, a tough domestic struggle is going on over fundamental and secondary issues of Asian policy. Elsewhere I characterized this struggle as being one of rivalry between two basically incompatible viewpoints, a militarizing or military viewpoint and a second, economic one.¹⁹

Russia's real problem in Asia is choosing between these fundamental and incompatible approaches. The militarizing viewpoint's adherents manifest a truculent disdain for Japan and civilian authority back home. For example, Russian Defense Minister Grachev and the Ministry of Defense (MOD) have frequently asserted that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)

cannot play the role of leader of Russian foreign policy. Instead that role should belong to or be usurped by them. Asked about possibly expanding ROK-Russian military cooperation, in 1993, Grachev boldly replied,

"I am willing to exchange opinions and cooperate with all Asian countries and their military leaders on all issues falling under the jurisdiction of our business." He went on to say he believed that, even in those instances in which politicians and diplomats were at a loss to solve problems between two countries, soldiers were capable of finding common ground within the framework of military cooperation between the two.²⁰

Similarly, Admiral Igor Kasatonov, First Deputy CINC of Russia's navy, stated in Vladivostok that nuclear dumping would continue in the Sea of Japan's enclosed waters, only 200 miles from Japan. Although Prime Minister Viktor S. Chernomyrdin had banned it, the dumping would continue because Kasatonov was "confident that Chernomyrdin's veto is a purely political move designed to please Japan and that the government will soon give permission for another dumping of radioactive waste."²¹ Kasatonov's statement came as a "complete surprise" to Foreign Ministry officials.²² His confidence in defying and dismissing his government's policy illustrates a fundamental structural crisis of Russian security policy. As Pavel Felgengauer, the respected defense correspondent of *Segodnya*, told a U.S.-Russian conference in California in November 1993, the armed forces may be under commanders' operational control; but commanders, officers, and troops are by no means under the government's strategic command and control.²³ Although much of the concern about this phenomenon has focused on Europe or the Caucasus, it is no less important in Asia. Kasatonov's remarks also indicate the armed forces' continuing intervention in politics.

Throughout 1992-93 the armed forces successfully and publicly intervened in the discussion over the Southern Kurile Islands. They mobilized parliamentary and public opinion against concessions to Japan, using arguments that, if analyzed carefully, are strategically questionable.²⁴ This intervention helped torpedo two proposed Yeltsin visits to Japan and limited opportunities for serious discussions when he finally went. Yet these intrusions went unpunished. Thereby encouraged, the military hard-liners continue undermining civilian authority and official diplomacy while conducting their own truculent and provocative anti-Japan policy.²⁵ Some civilian analysts charge that Kasatonov deliberately aimed to upstage the government.²⁶

Kasatonov's insubordination and his arrogant disdain for civilian authority showed a blunt disregard for the broader implications of his actions for national interests and continued the tradition of casting Russia's Far East interests primarily in military terms. Traditionally, the military view has been that the region is constantly threatened by enemies, particularly by

the United States, Japan, and China. In addition, the military has adopted a visibly racist attitude toward Japan and China. Today Japanese concerns are regarded with a combination of fear and (visibly) arrogant disdain, while the Far Eastern region is seen basically through the prism of potential military scenarios. Therefore, the adherents of the militarizing view currently also strongly support an alliance with China and spurn agreement with Japan over the Kurile Islands. They also have a unique slant on North Korea's missiles and proliferation threat.

Advocates of the second, economic, approach to Asia, on the other hand, see regional integration and joint cooperation as Russia's fundamental Asian-Pacific objective. They recognize, that (1) the Far East, in Chernomyrdin's words, is the "gateway" to the Asian, if not world, economies, (2) to join these economies, Russia must reconcile with Japan, and (3) failure to join spells disaster for Russia. Far from deliberately provoking Japan, they seek to resolve outstanding disputes and lessen mutual suspicions in both sides' interests. They do not view the Asia Pacific Region (APR) in zero-sum terms of warfare or of "ontological" enemies. Instead, economic integration in Asia benefits everyone. Almost every civilian analyst understands that the economic development of Siberia, the Maritime Provinces, and Russian Asia in general is the precondition for any effective Russian role in Asia's economy and politics. Otherwise Russia will not be taken seriously in Asia.²⁷ Therefore Russian statesmen should devise appropriate policies and institutions to facilitate economic development and international integration. A 1991 Soviet study, the *Russia Far Eastern Economic Yearbook*, reflected this continuing stress on ties to Japan, and the broader vision of a cooperative multilateralism in Northeast Asia that includes both Koreas. The authors wrote,

In this connection a special role of Japan in the economic development of the Far East should be mentioned. Under the conditions of the Soviet policy alteration Japan, with its powerful industrial, technological, and financial potential, as it seems, should play the leading part in the development of multilateral cooperation. First of all it means setting up of the economic zone 'Sea of Japan' in the North-East of Asia which could involve the economy of the Soviet Far East, the North-East of China, People's Democratic Republic of Korea, South Korea, Taiwan, and other interested countries. Realization of this project will contribute to the development of not only bilateral but also trilateral and multilateral cooperation, it will give a new impetus to the development of the Soviet-Japanese economic ties.²⁸

This divergence between the economic and militarizing approaches to Asia thus finds expression in tangible policy differences on Korean issues. While both sides agree that nuclear proliferation in North Korea is a serious affair having

repercussions for Russia should a war or more intense crisis develop, Russian generals discount Pyongyang's possession of nuclear weapons as having little serious *strategic significance* for Russia or for regional strategic and military balances. Therefore they do not take that threat too seriously.²⁹ *Krasnaia Zvezda*, the MOD's newspaper, cited Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service in stating that there was serious reason to doubt a North Korean "breakthrough" to produce nuclear weapons. The article's author concluded that Pyongyang "cooked up" the nuclear question to continue mobilizing the population while Washington did so to combat communism. However, the lack of clarity on the issue could lead other Asian states, particularly Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, to follow suit and go nuclear.³⁰

Obviously the military's main concern is a nuclear Japan, either within the umbrella of the U.S. security treaty or, if that breaks down, on its own. Then they fear that Japan would probably go nuclear or come under great pressure to do so.³¹ Although preventing a nuclear arms race in Asia is a shared goal, the view that the current crisis is "cooked up" solely for political reasons represents the military's suspicion of the United States and Japan. They also oppose pressing Pyongyang too hard with sanctions. Rather, they maintain that on this issue it is more important to come close to China's position.³² There also are elements within the government and among those favoring arms sales as a policy aiming to save Russia's defense industries that renewed sales, even if only of spares, to Pyongyang would regain leverage lost by Russia's unilateral renunciation of the treaty in 1992.³³ Because Russian help played a large role, a decade ago, in North Korea's buildup and nuclear program, arms sales could have dangerous consequences.

The author of the *Zvezda* article also opined that this crisis provides an opportunity to launch an Asian version of the Helsinki Conference. Russia would naturally then be invited to play a leading role in determining any outcome to the Korean crisis.³⁴ These are old, one-sided proposals to leverage Russia's military power so Russia will be taken seriously in Asia and to constrain U.S. and Japanese policies. At recent Russo-Japanese military meetings to create confidence-building measures, Russia's delegation called for a CSCE and CBM process like Europe's. Furthermore, Major General Anatoly Lukyanov stated that Russia wanted multilateral collective security everywhere.³⁵ Everything that has been written on Soviet and now Russian proposals along these lines indicates that these proposals, going back to Brezhnev's, aim at including Russia in Asian affairs and thereby diminishing the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-ROK alliances in favor of some amorphous collective security system.³⁶ Rather than build Asian security from below as many have argued, Russia continues to push the same one-sided visibly anti-Japanese and anti-American proposals. That these proposals are targeted against the U.S.-Japanese alliance is obvious from the statement by V.N. Bunin of the Academy of Sciences, holding that the U.S.-Japanese alliance must no longer be directed against any

countries in the region.³⁷ But calling for such processes also implies disregarding other states' security, particularly Japan's. Thus the Russian military delegation to Tokyo apparently avoided discussing Japan's primary security concern, North Korean nuclear proliferation.³⁸

These proposals are clearly designed to win the armed forces' support as is also signified by placing General Lukyanov at the head of Russia's delegation to Tokyo. Moreover, despite the search for a way to avoid regional nuclearization, Russian authors admit they do not know how to avert conventional arms proliferation, which is much more imminent a threat to the ROK, other than by the model of the Sino-Russian alliance. That is hardly applicable to the Korean Peninsula. And, in making this admission, they also admit that worst-case scenario planning for military contingencies in Asia continues. Major General A.V. Bolyatko (Ret.) states,

The question of downsizing armed forces and conventional armaments in Northeast Asia can prove to be fairly difficult, which is due to the complex strategic and military-political situation in the region. This is shown by the Soviet-Chinese negotiations and subsequently the Russian-Chinese negotiations on reducing armed forces in the border area, as well as by the indepth analysis of the problem of territorial division with Japan conducted by Russian military specialists. It was based on a worst case scenario for Russia, in the event of a large-scale conventional war in the Far East, taken out of the context of the military and political changes in the world, the agreements between Russia and the United States and the level of trust achieved by now. It envisions an all round defense and complete coverage of the Sea of Okhotsk and the adjacent territory from massed enemy attacks.

In our opinion, another approach is more reasonable whereby the resolution in the Kuril and South Sakhalin zones should be ensured on a trilateral basis by cutting not only Russian and Japanese zones but also U.S. zones.³⁹

Russia's call for a CSCE type system disregards the efforts of Asian states. It seeks to pre-define for them the parameters of security, showing little grasp of what Russia must do to fully participate in Asian security. Moreover, what really is intended here is that Japan be deprived of its security anchor while ignoring its concerns. This is not a viable basis for either enhancing Asian security or Russian integration into it. Were these goals to be achieved by Russia's initiative, they would also entail the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Korea, probably under conditions of a guaranteed unification process over time, denuclearization, and likely neutralization of all of Korea. It

is by no means certain that this is in U.S. interests since this unified Korea, whether neutral or not, would then have to maneuver on its own between three powers whom it distrusts and who distrust it: Japan, China, Russia.

Therefore, Korea's crisis offers military grounds for Russia to float obsolete and long-rejected initiatives to join Asia's security agenda. These proposals, either advanced or implicit in the militarizing approach, reflect Russia's continuing inability to play an active nonmilitary role in Asia, its hostility towards U.S.-Japanese policies, and also the fear that Russia might even be shut out of the defense and security agenda on its own borders. As noted above, many elites also still decry the loss of contacts with Pyongyang and wish to sell arms there, ostensibly to regain an audience and some leverage.

For the civilian adherents of the economic approach, proliferation in and of itself and any further nuclearization of Asia constitute a threat to Russia regardless of their origin. Russia's Ambassador to Seoul, Georgii F. Kunadze, stated that Russia's principled position is absolute objection to the presence of nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula (this also includes U.S. systems whose absence obviously enhances Russian security).⁴⁰ These figures view North Korea's gambit and the world's response not as a bluff but as a serious potential crisis with dangerous regional implications. For example, Vadim Makarenko wrote that Russia cannot remain impartial about Chinese nuclear testing because of the danger of an arms race and nuclear proliferation.

For Russia, moreover, with its sparsely populated Siberia and Far East, and its sharply decreasing capacities for maintaining large conventional armed forces, guarantees of nuclear security are becoming vitally necessary. This makes Russia extremely interested in the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons in the world.⁴¹

Unfortunately, it appears that the logic and adherents of the militarizing approach to Asia have won the struggle for now. Accordingly Yeltsin's proposed conference must be interpreted in the light of their objectives and interests. Obviously the main objective of those directing Asian and Korean policy is still collective security in Asia with a program for a denuclearization of Korea (and Japan), unified by an acceptable peaceful process, and the probably phased recession of American military power from Korea. Japan would be isolated. Meanwhile, Russia, which still cannot participate in Asia on an equal basis or one commensurate to its potential, would enjoy a disproportionate role as a guardian of this order that has a veto over other states while it eludes that control. This is because a collective security system, as is well known, cannot ensure either collectivity or security to its members or stop any single member from flouting its conventions and rules.⁴²

The 10 Power Conference and Russian Korean Policy.

For these reasons Russia's proposed 10 power conference and its policy on the Korean peninsula is more multifaceted than might otherwise appear to be the case. Actually it is shrouded in ambiguities and conflicts. Russian officials cannot even agree whether or not North Korea presently has a viable nuclear bomb. That is not an academic question, since those contending that the North currently lacks the capability obviously have a more benign view of the DPRK's capabilities and objectives, a softer spot for it, and less belief in the current crisis' urgency. Among those so arguing is Chief of Staff, Colonel General Mikhail Kolesnikov. Replying to charges published in Japan, and based on classified General Staff documents that Russia actively helped the North build nuclear systems a decade ago, and that Russian scientists are currently working in the North, he called the charges about past policy nonsense. He added the assertion,

That Pyongyang has one or two nuclear warheads and that several more will come off its assembly lines by the end of the year is sheer nonsense. I can say with full authority that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has none of these things. Just as it does not have any such mythical missiles as the Rodong-1 and Rodong-2 [Nodong-1 and Nodong-2] or several hundred other nuclear warhead delivery vehicles.⁴³

More recently, the scientist who allegedly designed the DPRK's nuclear reactor, Vladislav Kotlov, a top Russian scientist in the Ministry of Nuclear Power Engineering, said the whole crisis was merely a procedural one revolving around the IAEA's inspection regime. Japan and South Korea were only trying to stir unrest and create a "scandal" with U.S. backing. On the same day Foreign Minister Kozyrev also questioned whether the North had already developed a weapon. While it probably could do so in the future, he was not sure about now. In any event Russia and the United States were now constructively coordinating their actions on the issue.⁴⁴ On the other hand, on February 14, 1994, two weeks after Japanese newspapers published the charges that Kolesnikov sought to refute, Vladimir Kumachev, an advisor to the Director of Russia's Institute of National Security and Strategic Research, claimed that North Korea had both nuclear weapons and delivery vehicles for them. Also, as early as 1985, Moscow became aware of the North's nuclear ambitions, leading Moscow to withdraw most of its specialists from there.⁴⁵ More recently a February 1990 document, allegedly written by then head of the KGB Vladimir Kryuchkov, reportedly concluded, based on reliable sources, that the North did indeed already have a suitable nuclear weapon that it planned to hide from the world. The report also stated that North Korea's leadership was determined "to gain military superiority over South Korea" and join the ranks of nuclear states.⁴⁶ Thus it is unclear how urgently Moscow or

Russia's elite circles view the threat or danger (the two are not the same in Russian parlance) of nuclear proliferation or imminent conflict in Korea. And it is equally unclear how serious are Moscow's protestations of good faith and unconcern that an imminent nonproliferation or military crisis is at hand.

Clearly, Kolesnikov speaks for a large part of the military and of the overall policy community.⁴⁷ And this fact, given the possibility of deliberate deception, casts a grave light over any Russian proposals. Thus, at the Russo-Japanese-U.S. talks cited above, Russia's delegation stated that Japan's concerns about nuclear proliferation were misplaced. Russia believed that existing nuclear potential is not the same thing as a nuclear capacity.

It follows, therefore, that the DPRK must not be allowed to feel that its security is compromised at all. A policy of pressuring North Korea and creating a vacuum around it can only have the opposite effect, and incite it to accelerate the creation of nuclear weapons. What is needed is dialogue with Pyongyang. And the way is clear. *Not without the participation of Russian diplomacy*, it was decided to place seven North Korean facilities under IAEA supervision. (Emphasis by the author)⁴⁸

Kolesnikov's views are not only shared by many members of Russia's elite, they apparently are also those of China, or at least his counterparts there, Chief of Staff Zhang Wannian and Deputy Chairman of the Central Military Council of the PRC Liu Hunaqin (Deng Xiaoping's man in the PLA). After visiting China in April 1994, Kolesnikov stated that their views were quite close in that they categorically are against any proliferation of nuclear technologies. But the problem in Northeast Asia is complicated by the fact that while the North does have a "tough and inflexible stand"; it is being subjected to "unfairly tough pressure" from the UN and IAEA.⁴⁹

That support for Kolesnikov's views exists throughout much of Russia's policy community is also incontestable. Deputy Foreign Minister Panov, former Ambassador to Seoul, denied that the North has a nuclear capability. Moreover, the crisis should be resolved, not by coercive or compulsory measures like sanctions, but by the Russian proposed conference.⁵⁰ Ivan Rybkin, Speaker of the Lower House of the Duma, told the DPRK's ambassador in Moscow that "Russia's new policy is based on the premise that finding new friends does not mean losing old chums."⁵¹ In May 1994, Panov also told ITAR-TASS that both Russia and the DPRK favor boosting bilateral links, including political contacts. North Korea also advocates Russia's participation in the Rajin-Sonborg free economic zone and cooperation in Siberia and the Far East. North Korea also told him "quite firmly" that it welcomed Russia's initiative for an international conference and is studying it.⁵² While that does not mean acceptance, it is

a sign of something more than the outright refusal to accept Russian mediation that had previously been the case.⁵³ And with that sign of mellowing attitudes came *Izvestiya's* report that Russia fears U.S. proposals for sanctions because Russia, who trades with the DPRK, would have to pay for them. In addition, diplomats maintain it is necessary to have a balanced relationship with both Koreas to correct the tilt to Seoul that had emerged.⁵⁴ Similarly MOD circles now do not rule out the possibility of supplying the North Korean Army with spare parts in order to obtain additional levers for influencing the DPRK's leaders.⁵⁵ Finally, Moscow Radio, broadcasting in Korean, favored the North's demand that Washington negotiate a peace treaty with it to replace the 1953 Panmunjom armistice. The broadcast observed that any conflict in Korea "would not be limited to the Korean peninsula as it was not some 50 years ago."⁵⁶

These feelers indicate mostly Moscow's effort to play the role of mediator between both Koreas and demonstrate that it is a real player in Asia. They do not necessarily betoken a profound shift in the DPRK's policy. But clearly Moscow was discomfited that a crisis in whose resolution it had a vital and traditional geopolitical stake was being conducted without its input. During February-March 1994, when Russia made its original proposal for the conference, its relative absence from the Asian agenda did not go unnoticed. As *Izvestiya's* Tokyo correspondent, Sergei Agafonov indicated, nobody actually approved Russia's proposal or seemed to want its participation. Washington, following its general underestimation of Russian prospects in Asia, placed its emphasis on securing South Korean, Chinese, and Japanese cooperation versus the DPRK.⁵⁷ And South Korean President Kim Young Sam said as much to his Parliament. Agafonov stated that this was inevitable because recently Russia has become an "outsider" to Asia. He attacked Mikhail Gorbachev's "none too wise" unilateral move to recognize South Korea as creating a situation where Moscow has no leverage on its other partners in Asia. Moscow, he wrote, still had no coherent concept for Asia and was economically irrelevant to it except for arms sales.⁵⁸

These criticisms also reflected the complaints of many to the right and in the military concerning Russia's Asian policy and they clearly stung. Thus Moscow redoubled the public drive to get its proposal on the table and head off the U.S. led pressure on the North, and sanctions supported by the other states cited above, without Russian participation. As broadcast by the MFA, the proposal for a 10 power conference expressed support for UN resolutions in the Security Council that the DPRK meet its commitments to the IAEA for open inspection. The MFA also stated that Russia will seek decisive action by the Security Council in other cases of threatened nuclear proliferation "without double standards." The MFA also intends to promote a comprehensive solution to the crisis involving an agenda that,

Must make it possible to reach comprehensive solutions that take account of the legitimate interests of all

the parties involved. In particular, subjects for discussion and agreement could be security guarantees for the DPRK and the ROK, assistance for the process of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula with international guarantees of its non-nuclear status, including appropriate international verification, and guarantees of noninterference in the internal affairs of the DPRK and ROK.⁵⁹

Two weeks later, on April 8 1994, Panov observed that the United States had sidestepped accepting or rejecting the proposal by saying such a conference must be well prepared. He supported the U.S. position that the DPRK must fully and unconditionally return to the NPT and accept IAEA inspection, which would be accompanied by or constitute denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula (since U.S. strategic and tactical nuclear forces were removed in 1991). But Russia, he said, also felt that a guarantee to the North that ensures Korean denuclearization, both Korean states' sovereignty, and nonintervention in their internal affairs should be part of the agenda.⁶⁰ Panov also qualified his earlier statement that Russia would adhere to the 1961 treaty if an unprovoked attack on the North occurred, saying that Moscow would judge whether or not any such attack was unprovoked and operate under its own constitutional and legal procedures.⁶¹ Nonetheless, the hint to Pyongyang doubtless played a part in the recent mellowing of its relations with Russia.

Meanwhile, no state has accepted that this conference should take place with Russia's proposed agenda. As an ROK official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs observed, such a proposal can only further extend the process and make the negotiations still more unwieldy. Moscow can probably regain some influence in the DPRK through this proposal, but neither Beijing nor Seoul accept that state of affairs and they still are wary concerning Russia's ultimate Asian ambitions.⁶²

Thus Moscow's main proposal for this conference, just like its similar proposal for a conference on the Israel-Arab conflict, aims mainly to convince itself and others that Russia is still taken seriously in Asia. But its international implications are no less unsettling. Kozyrev has stated that Moscow will not support sanctions upon which it has not been previously consulted. In view of the domestic opposition to sanctions which hurt Russian trade with the North and, if they mean war, bring that war to Russia's borders, support for sanctions was unlikely. This was the case even before Ex-President Carter's mission to Pyongyang which has led to a freeze in the North's nuclear program, preparations for an all Korean summit, and a resumption of the U.S. negotiations with the North in July 1994. The Carter mission's accomplishments make sanctions, or Russian support for an exclusively U.S. initiative, even more unlikely. Even if both sets of talks break down, Russia will hardly agree to sanctions without support for its conference proposal due to the domestic opposition to any U.S. initiatives

and due to its own conflicted posture in Asia that ultimately aims at diminishing the U.S. alliance system and military presence there.⁶³

Nor is it clear that the United States should support Russia's proposal. Animating it is an effort to achieve goals that are to some degree tangential to and even unrelated to the issues at hand. Second, it would, at best, impose further delay which is only in the North's interest. Third, Russia and Japan have no common basis upon which to build a solution here other than a preference for a divided and nonnuclear Korea. That slender common interest provides no basis for those two states to cooperate or for the United States to cooperate with Russia. Clearly, Japan strongly opposes the conference proposal.⁶⁴ Furthermore, given present conditions, Russia will probably line up behind China which has a more immediate and vital interest in Korean issues. This will make it a supporter to some degree of North Korea's position, a fact that can only impede progress in this conference. For these reasons we must conclude that the Russian initiative is largely driven by interests opposed to the U.S. Asian position and represents a Trojan horse for Tokyo, Washington, and Seoul.

Conclusions.

The sudden death, on July 8, 1994, of Kim-Il Sung, North Korea's dictator, has not yet (as of September 1994) altered the situation on the ground with respect to Russia. Though Kim's death held up bilateral DPRK-U.S. negotiations for a month, they have resumed and appear to be a serious dialogue. In Russia, if anything, these events have reinforced both the sense of domestic struggle over foreign policy and interest in the 10 power conference. Foreign Minister Kozyrev publicized the struggle raging over foreign policy by denouncing parliamentarians who he claimed were supporting the DPRK. He reiterated his belief that if the bilateral talks break down, there will be no alternative but Russia's plan, despite other states' coolness to the idea.⁶⁵

Nonetheless, Russia's current policy represents a significant backtracking from its earlier policies in 1991-93. At that time Yeltsin and his emissaries talked publicly of unilaterally abandoning the 1961 treaty with Pyongyang. Now they talk of renegotiating an altered treaty. The same holds true, as we see above, for arms sales to North Korea.⁶⁶ While efforts to upgrade ROK-Russia collaboration in military technology and arms trade for debt have significantly failed, leaving behind considerable disillusionment in South Korea, Russian interest in selling arms to the North is both overtly expressed and gaining in the government.⁶⁷ This shift in policy reflects the victory of those favoring the military point of view and the interests of the military-industrial complex that seeks markets abroad to survive, whatever the policy implications of that decision may be. Thus current trends in Russian policy on Korea constitute an

important part of the ascendancy of military-strategic considerations above all else in overall Asian policy.⁶⁸

It is not surprising that Russian policy is self-serving, ambiguous, conflicted, and even possibly deceptive, if not deceitful, given newly publicized intelligence reports. That is in the nature of things given current Russian conditions and represents, in itself, little advance from past Soviet proposals for regional arms control and security.⁶⁹ But Russia's posture on this issue is also profoundly significant for what it portends regarding general issues in Asian security.

In the absence of strong regional or subregional systems and where states manifest an asymmetry of interest, multilateral security discussions, let alone regimes, prove to be very difficult to construct. The current Korean crisis is only the most intense instance of this truth. As Edward Olsen and David Winterford have written,

The Asia-Pacific region confronts the problem of simultaneously creating a multilateral security system and building a compatible arms control system. Vastly complicating this situation is the prospect that there will not be one of each, but that the sub-regions will spawn separate versions of each system. The linkages between them (if any) are problematical.⁷⁰

Russia's example shows that on top of these problems, individual states will continue pushing self-serving and incompatible objectives for both arms control and overall regional regimes, thereby further complicating efforts by the United States and its allies to work constructively for multilateral security in subregions, regions, or across the region.

A second consequence of this ascendancy of the military factor in Russian policy is that it encourages the tendency for Russia to go beyond friendship with China, which is universally supported in Russia, to actual alliance on the basis of an ideological anti-Westernism and anti-Americanism and on the basis of a search for geopolitical revenge that far transcends sound *Realpolitik*.⁷¹ That alliance also encourages those in China, e.g., the authors of the book, *Can China's Armed Forces Win the Next War?*, who clearly articulate the opinion of or policy preferences of key elite constituencies there. They argue that the most significant factor in the expected Sino-U.S. confrontation is the attitude of the Russian armed forces.⁷² Should a Sino-Russian alliance come about, it would fundamentally derail efforts toward a broader strategic stability in Asia, not just in Korea, but very probably in the South China Sea area, the center of Chinese attention.

In other words, Russia's Korean policy is important for what it tells us about trends at home towards demilitarizing past

policy and achieving successful reform throughout Russia and in the central Far Eastern regions. It is also, of course, important as a sign of Russia's willingness to rejoin Asia on a new basis and contribute to peace and security for everyone's benefit. On the basis of what is now transpiring in Russia's Korean and Asian policy, it will become more difficult to create a Russia that can contribute in a positive way to Asian security and stability and an Asia that can welcome a reformed Russia into its midst.

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