

# Tomorrow's Northeast Asia



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**Prospects for Emerging East Asian Cooperation  
and  
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## PREFACE

The Korea Economic Institute (KEI) in Washington, D.C., in cooperation with the School of International Service (SIS) at American University, also in Washington, D.C., cosponsored an academic symposium at SIS on 20–22 October 2010 on “Tomorrow’s Northeast Asia.” This volume contains the papers that were presented at the symposium and subsequently refined.

The 2010 symposium focused on emerging and future challenges facing Northeast Asia. Papers and discussions fell under five broad topics:

- Prospects for emerging East Asian cooperation and implications for the United States
- The emerging role of South Korea on a global stage
- The future of energy security in Northeast Asia
- Engaging and transforming North Korea’s economy
- Finding room for a six-party solution to North Korea’s nuclear crisis.

The sponsors and authors welcome comments on the material in this volume. This is the 21st in a series of annual academic symposia on Asia-Pacific economic and security issues that bring together leading academics and policy professionals from throughout the region.

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*December 2010*



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# RUSSIA AND THE SIX-PARTY PROCESS IN KOREA

*Stephen Blank*

## ABSTRACT

The stagnation of the six-party process has produced great anxiety in Russia over the future of the Korean peninsula. Indeed, in September 2010, even before the attack on Yeonpyeong and the announcement of a uranium enrichment facility, Moscow's representative to the six-party talks stated that Korea was on the brink of war. This anxiety reflects that perhaps Russia, of the external non-Korean members of the six-party process, has the most to lose. Russia lacks leverage on any other power and confronts the danger of marginalization. War would only aggravate all its concerns and derail any hope of developing the Russian Far East, a development that is the precondition for an effective Russian presence in Asia. For these reasons Russia, perhaps more than any other country, shows the greatest anxiety about the developing trends on the Korean peninsula.

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## Introduction

Even before the *Cheonan* incident of March 2010 when North Korea torpedoed a South Korean ship killing 46 sailors, the six-party process had become moribund, if not defunct. North Korea refused to rejoin it while the other five parties could not formulate a common strategy or approach. This situation, which is unlikely to change significantly anytime soon, poses multiple risks and dangers to everyone, not least Russia. The current situation threatens a major crisis on Russia's doorstep over which it has no control or at best very limited influence. Worse, many possible future trends regarding North Korea's nuclearization could further marginalize Russia in the six-party process and in Northeast Asia.

First, although U.S. officials do not believe North Korea will overstep its brinksmanship and deliberately start a war, they expect more provocations from Pyongyang (De Luce 2010a; Bloomberg 2010). The announcement of a North Korean uranium enrichment plant in November 2010 obviously constitutes such a provocation (Sanger 2010a). Obviously those provocations could trigger a bigger crisis since North Korea's favorite tactic to get attention is to create a crisis. At the same time the North's provocations could trigger further miscalculations by any of the parties. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Director of Central Intelligence Leon Panetta see these provocations as the putative successor Kim Jong-un's efforts to win his stripes with the DPRK's armed forces or as Kim Jong-il's efforts to solidify the military's loyalty to Kim Jong-un (Sanger and Shanker 2010). Those provocations, of course, can easily get out of control and generate an uncontrollable process leading to conflict.

Second, the *Cheonan* incident has apparently led the United States to seek more options with which to punish North Korea even if it does not seek war against it. The incident also has led South Korea to consult even more closely with not only the United States but also Japan on a coordinated response, thereby marginalizing Russia and isolating China (De Luce 2010b; Kessler 2010, 12).

Third, the incident forced Russia to enter into very intense and close consultations with China, but Russia has no real influence over the other actors (Yu 2010). But, because both China and Russia share the view that the greater danger is instability on the Korean peninsula, China failed to act this time against North Korea, and China and Russia have been in some measure isolated while the United States and its allies have grown closer and more demanding. They are in no hurry to resume the six-party process without prior North Korean concessions (Kim 2010). Not only does this isolate China and Russia; it also deprives Russia of its minimal means of influencing regional events and preserves the

regional bipolarity in Northeast Asia that could more easily lead to a conflict against Russia's interests. Asian observers even believe that China's failure to act contributed to Washington's decision to move naval vessels closer to China (Kim 2010). We could therefore see an increase in mistrust and suspicion as well as more provocative behavior from North Korea and a hardening of U.S. positions that would merely intensify the existing polarization between Washington and Pyongyang as well as the polarization between Washington and Beijing.

The *Cheonan* incident also offers other dangers to Russia—marginalization, for example. Clearly nobody has considered Russia seriously as a partner in the diplomacy revolving around this crisis. South Korea and the United States approached China and Japan to coordinate regional and allied responses, isolating Russia even though China failed to act. Consequently, Russia unilaterally stepped into the breach, conducting its own investigation of the incident, but actually Russia is desperately scrambling to save the six-party process or figure out some other process by which it can play a role commensurate with its ambitions. But its investigation, which challenges South Korea's view, found that the ship sank after an explosion caused by its crew's own navigational errors; this conclusion will not be released lest Russia's position be further eroded with everyone.

Fourth, many argue that incidents like the *Cheonan* affair may be driven by the exigencies of the succession issue in North Korean politics. Succession to Kim Jong-il, as many experts know, could quite easily trigger internal or external clashes, or both, in and around the DPRK, clashes that could easily drag the outside powers into conflict. North Korean military risk taking on this scale ranks high among possible contingencies (Willis and Seo 2010; Sanger and Shanker 2010).

Fifth, many signs point to a genuine possibility of internal ferment within North Korea even apart from the succession crisis. The outbreak of a major domestic crisis, whether or not it is tied to foreign challenges, could destabilize North Korea and lead to very grave and unforeseen crises (*Economist* 2010, 23–25; Frank 2009; *Chosun Ilbo* 2008; *Chosun Ilbo* 2009; Stafford 2008, 98). Given the looming succession crisis and inflation along with the apparent ascendancy of antireform and pronuclear elements, this domestic hardening undermines prospects for a more accommodating foreign policy should Pyongyang even return to the six-party talks. And beyond the regime's efforts to clamp down at home lies the fact that many indicators point to what Soviet historians might have called a revolutionary crisis in North Korean society. Defections, corruption, riots when the 2009 currency reform was introduced, jailbreaks, the breaking of the regime's information monopoly, and a precarious food situation are all

hallmarks of a potential upheaval that could erupt if there is a break in leadership or elite cohesion. Alternatively, elites who lose out may defect or seek to overturn that result. Therefore nobody can take the long-term stability of North Korea for granted even if the regime currently seems stable (*Chosun Ilbo* 2009; Stafford 2008, 99).

These trends could cause the six-party process to freeze, if not die or wither away. Although hitherto the process has been both a negotiating forum and a mechanism for crisis management in Northeast Asia, it now appears to be driven by North Korean provocations or processes rather than by a consensus among its members. Neither China nor Russia is ready to condemn North Korea for the *Cheonan* incident or impose further penalties against it (Snyder, Cossa, and Glosserman 2006). Consequently Pyongyang's official position all but guarantees the stagnation if not the breakdown of the process for its stated positions are utterly incompatible with U.S. objectives. The DPRK's agenda for resuming negotiations focuses on the following clear set of goals (Revere 2010, 183–84):

- Recognizing the DPRK's status as a de facto nuclear weapons state or, failing that, preventing efforts to disarm its nuclear weapons;
- Convincing Washington and others that they have no choice but to normalize relations with North Korea;
- Maximizing all the material benefits to be gained through negotiations while conceding nothing on its nuclear program;
- Convincing the international community and the UN Security Council to lift existing sanctions and impose no new ones; and
- Shifting discussion of the six-party talks from denuclearization to a "peace regime" based on ending or attenuating the U.S. alliances with Japan and South Korea.

Pyongyang's demands and defiant assertion that it will not denuclearize therefore run straight into Washington's counterdemand that it will not recognize the DPRK as a nuclear weapons state and that North Korea must reenter the negotiations without any preconditions and denuclearize to avoid further sanctions. Indeed, even China agrees that a peace treaty to the Korean War cannot be signed until the North denuclearizes (RIA Novosti 2010a; AFP 2010; Global Security Newswire 2010; Reuters 2007). Thus, at best, an impasse appears to be the foreseeable future of the six-party process.

## Russia's Dilemmas

Whatever problems these trends cause for the other five powers, arguably this impasse most injures Russia as a participant in the larger Korean peace process. Because this process aims to not only deal with the DPRK's nuclear proliferation but also chart a path toward an overall peace for Korea and create new multilateral frameworks for Northeast Asia, the longer this impasse lasts, the more Russia suffers. And this is not just because Russia is the chairman of the working group on a new multilateral security system for Northeast Asia, although that is serious enough. The current impasse threatens Russian interests in many ways.

First, Russia confronts an explosive situation and potential crisis of immense magnitude on its doorstep, but where it has little or no influence over many of the main actors, not least Pyongyang. And this crisis, which it can do little to manage or control, has enormous potential consequences for Russia. A recent article (Nikolaev 2010, 68–69) in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs journal, *International Affairs*, stated (incidentally quoting a Chinese analyst Zhou Feng):

Indeed, the situation on the Korean Peninsula, which is in close proximity to our Far Eastern borders, is explosive and fraught with the most unpredictable consequences. Peace is very fragile here. No one can guarantee that it will not collapse as a result of a clash between the two Koreas with the involvement of other countries in the conflict and the use of weapons of mass destruction. “The aggravation of the North Korean nuclear issue is one of the long standing problems leading to new ones. This issue cannot be expected to be settled easily because difficulties have emerged in relations among large East Asian states. The settlement process can subsequently lead to a redistribution of roles of large states on the Asian political field—that is a new regional security problem.”

That restructuring of the Asian political order could easily ensue at Russia's expense given its visible relative weakness there. And it could ensue by means over which Russia has little or no influence even if they are not violent means. While Moscow has long since said that it does not fear the unification of the two Koreas and might actually welcome that outcome—Moscow's Interfax reported this on 24 September 2007—Moscow could only do so if that happened through a peaceful process, not war.

This potential restructuring of the Asian state system also has profound implications for Russia's Far East (RFE), which Moscow already sees as a major security

problem because of its relative poverty, isolation from European Russia, and vulnerability to a host of foreign influences, particularly a Chinese economic takeover, reported Interfax on 24 September 2007. Failure to move forward on the Korean issues, if it leads to war or the stagnation of regional economic development, threatens Russia's domestic development program for the RFE. As Gleb Ivashentsov (2009a), Moscow's ambassador to Seoul, said:

In no other region are internal and external interests of Russia so interconnected as in Northeast Asia. For the future of Russia as a great power to a great extent depends on the economic, technological, and social uplift of Siberia and the Russian Far East. To achieve that aim we need the absence of external threats. By Russia's view such guarantees could be best provided by promoting positive relations with her neighbors.

Therefore Russia desperately wants to prevent a war breaking out over Korea either by U.S. and ROK attacks on the North or by a North Korean attack on South Korea or Japan. Moscow's reaction to the *Cheonan* incident, its professed skepticism as to whether North Korea actually sank the ship, its insistence on conducting its own investigation, its readiness to cooperate with China to avert escalation of the crisis by all means, and its insistence on returning to the table all indicate Russia's anxiety lest this crisis engender a breakdown of the negotiation process or lead to actual conflict (Kipp 2010).

Such a conflict could quickly escalate even to the nuclear level and could only end with a hostile power (either the United States or China) occupying North Korea and its border with Russia. It is not certain that Russia could stay out of such a war, and the consequences of it would, under almost every imaginable circumstance, be very severe. No outcome here is acceptable to Russia, but its means of preventing these possible outcomes are decidedly limited. At the same time, conflict on the Korean peninsula also undermines any hope of developing the RFE with foreign assistance since Russia cannot do so alone. Absent such a development, all talk of Russia as a great Asian power remains just that: talk.

Beyond preventing a war, Russia has several other objectives regarding Korea that are now at risk owing to the current impasse. Primarily it seeks to obtain lasting acknowledgement of its status as a great Asian power that can participate in and is necessary for establishing a regional Asia-Pacific security system. Indeed, Russia publicly regards its participation in these talks as a touchstone of the international recognition and acknowledgment of that status. Therefore, Russia takes its standing in the six-party process very seriously. Russia's exclu-



sion from efforts in the 1990s to deal with North Korea's nuclearization was widely resented and taken as a sign of Russia's marginality in Asia, much to Russia's anger. An American who is a prominent Asia expert, Lowell Dittmer (2003, 39), actually referred to the Russia of this era as a diplomatic nonentity. Not surprisingly, foreign, if not domestic, observers also seriously questioned the notion that Russia was a great power or entitled to claim such a status, which every Russian politician believes to be Russia's birthright (Freedman 22–35; Neumann 2005, 13–28).

Therefore Moscow fought very hard in 2003 to gain entry into the six-party process. It succeeded only because North Korea wanted Russia there in order to have a more sympathetic voice and to balance China. China did nothing to bring Russia into the talks despite the two countries' strategic partnership, and China essentially ignored Russia's claims to having a legitimate interest in the proceedings before 2003. North Korea's insistence on Russia's presence thus justified Russia's previous ties to North Korea, which had been cemented in 2000–02 (Buszynski 2010, 271–81).

Since then and given the economic recovery from 1999 to 2008, Russians naturally came to believe that they were, like the Soviet Union, an indispensable actor and global great power whose writ must be respected. The six-party talks symbolized that achievement. Accordingly, Ivashentsov literally imitated Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko's boast to the 24th Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, albeit with much less justification. Emulating Gromyko, Ivashentsov (2009b, 86) wrote, "Russia came back to the world arena as a strong state, a state that other nations defer to and that can hold its own. Not a single international problem of any importance can be solved without Russia or in defiance of Russia. That is something South Korea is well aware of." But, in fact, throughout the process China has continued to overshadow Russia, and in many ways the other players see Russia as something of a marginal participant in the process (Buszynski 2010, 271–81; Kiesow and Lee 2010, 44). Thus, a Dutch evaluation (Van Der Meer 2008, 86–87) of Russia's posture stated:

At first sight, Russia's role within the six-party talks does not look that impressive. Some observers call the Russian performance in these talks "weak," others "lackluster." In Russia itself, the government itself has also been criticized because of its perceived "passivity" and "inactivity" at the six-party talks. Indeed, Russia did not launch any important initiatives, but has mostly been supporting Chinese and South Korean initiatives, even trying strategically to coordinate their positions during summit meetings. Russia's main

role has been to voice the need for peaceful solutions and to prevent too much pressure on North Korea. In this regard, the Russian position is often described as supportive towards North Korea. It is clear, however, that Russia has not been able to exercise any influence on the regime in Pyongyang at all. The North Korean regime considers Russia to be a welcome ally to back it against the influence of both the United States and China, but apart from that, it does not see Russia as an important player on the peninsula—and Russia is aware of that.

Indeed, foreign diplomats have privately ridiculed Russia's contribution to the process as being "more nuisance than value," demonstrating Russia's low standing in Asia and on the Korea problem (Lo 2008, 240).

A second and no less crucial goal is to prevent the breakdown or collapse of the DPRK, a goal that became even more critical in view of North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons and signs of the aforementioned "revolutionary situation" there.

Third, and related to its unhappiness over North Korea's nuclearization, is the fact that Pyongyang's policies provide an unassailable justification for both U.S. and Japanese missile defenses in the Asia-Pacific region, something that Moscow and Beijing have steadily opposed but that they cannot refute, given Pyongyang's actions (Blank 2008).

The issue of missile defense in Asia had been in a kind of abeyance, but the North Korean nuclear tests of 2006 led to a revival of Sino-Russian concern about missile defenses there because those tests furnished a compelling justification for missile defenses, especially around Japan and South Korea. These tests, which defied Russo-Chinese warnings against nuclearization and testing, intensified and accelerated the U.S.-Japanese collaboration on missile defenses as the justification for them was now incontrovertible. But such programs always do and have a resonance of checking China. This naturally greatly annoys Beijing (Pollack 2007, 86–87). For this reason China continues to publicly criticize U.S.-Japan collaboration on missile defenses, as in an Interfax report out of Moscow on 24 October 2007. Perhaps this issue was on President Hu Jintao's agenda when he called for Russia and China to enhance cooperation in Asia-Pacific security, as reported by both Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) and Xinhua on 8 September 2007.

Beyond the fact of Japan's participation in an accelerating race to construct these missile defenses, aimed ostensibly at North Korea but actually against Japan, lie two considerations. The first is that construction of missile defenses deprives China of the use of its habitual missile threat against Japan. But, second (Pollack 2007, 87):

North Korea's actions therefore validated a much more threat-based concept of regional security, with Japanese defense officials privately signaling that a far more vigorous Japanese security strategy was designed at least as much with China in mind. Chinese leaders were deeply offended by Pyongyang's willful defiance of Beijing's urgings that it not test. But the Chinese remained equally uneasy over the longer-term implications of a more threat-driven regional environment, and of Japan's prospective contributions to it.

This same argument pertains to Russia, given its entrenched suspicions regarding U.S. missile defenses.

Fourth, Russia seeks an equilibrium or balance in Northeast Asia between the U.S. alliance system and the rising China. But to do so because its overall security policy has an anti-U.S. default option that postulates hostility toward the United States as a global constant and starting point of policy, it must incline toward China.

Fifth, Russia seeks to establish lasting economic and political ties with both Korean states, especially regarding energy supplies. Nevertheless, Russia, like all the other members of the process except North Korea, has met with repeated frustration and failures in stabilizing the Korean peninsula.

For all these reasons Russia opposes both North Korea's nuclearization and U.S. threats against it. It would prefer to see a mechanism that resembles the Concert of Powers that emerged in Europe after the Congress of Vienna in 1815, in which it would participate on equal terms with everyone else. Going back to Leonid Brezhnev's time, Moscow has promoted various schemes of collective security or a concert of powers in East Asia (Lo 2008, 123–25). This concert of powers, although not precisely defined, is the only way in which its alleged great-power status can be recognized or acknowledged throughout Asia (Rangismaporn 2009, 230–34). The concert would manage regional security in Northeast Asia, oversee the denuclearization of North Korea, and implement a currently undefined process for reducing regional tensions.

## **Russia's Current Perspective**

For Russia 2009 and 2010 have been difficult years vis-à-vis Korea. Russia has primarily sought to ensure its own inclusion in the six-party talks and establish itself as a reliable partner for both Koreas. Moscow intends to use its ability to supply both Koreas with energy to both ensure its place in the settlement and unite the Koreas with Russia in an enduring economic-political association. When the six-party agreement took shape in February 2007, ITAR-TASS on 13 February 2007 (reported by FBIS on the same day) reported comments by a foreign policy expert that Russia could create the conditions needed to implement “a series of major multilateral projects with the participation of both North Korea and Russia,” including oil and gas transit, electricity transfers, and the so-called TKR-TSR project connecting a Trans-Korean Railway with Russia's Trans-Siberian Railway, the centerpiece of Russian transport policy for Asia. Significantly, ITAR-TASS saw these projects as benefiting not just Moscow and Pyongyang, but also Seoul.

Both the ROK and Russia are eager to construct through both Koreas a Russian gas pipeline, complete with a petrochemical industrial park and a liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant. That should begin in 2010, be completed in 2015, and ship 7.5 million tons of gas (measured in LNG) annually for 30 years. This is 20 percent of the ROK's annual import of natural gas (Ko 2008, 442). The cost of this natural gas pipeline project is enormous (Ko 2008):

If it succeeds, this will be a super-size economic cooperation project worth over \$100 U.S. Billion, covering the purchasing price of natural gas (U.S.\$ 90 Billion), construction costs for the petrochemical industrial park (U.S.\$ 9 Billion), and construction costs for the PNG through North Korea. (U.S.\$ 3 Billion) This project will represent a typical energy development project promoted by the Lee Myung-bak government.

The opportunity to provide North Korea and, through it, South Korea with reliable sources of energy is essential if Russia is to be a meaningful presence on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia's regional security order. Indeed, energy supplies might be the only way Russia can play a major role in any Korean peace process. And even that might not be enough as we have seen how little Russia actually contributes to the six-party talks. In 2007–08 there was even speculation that Russia was wearying of the six-party talks on account of North Korea's obstreperous behavior but also because the bilateral talks between the United States and North Korea had sidelined it and Japan, relegating Russia

and Japan to a lower status in the talks (Ferguson 2008). In the Russo-Japanese foreign ministers' talks in December 2009, Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov (2009) dismissed such talk, paradoxically and unintentionally suggesting Russia's fears of any bilateral U.S.-DPRK deal. Naturally Russian analysts are at pains to refute such arguments, constantly invoking Russia's importance to the talks and Russia's constructive plans for a settlement (Toloraya 2009). Nevertheless, despite its rancor at these characterizations, the fact remains that Russia is far from being a major factor at these talks, whereas the United States and China are the players whose role is decisive to the outcome of the talks.

Consequently the collapse of the six-party process is a major loss for Russia because it delays and minimizes Russia's chances to count for something serious in the Korean security equation and puts Russia's overall Asian policy at considerable risk. Not surprisingly Russia has consistently counseled moderation toward North Korea, been very cautious about sanctions even though President Dmitry Medvedev considers North Korea a greater threat than Iran, and steadfastly argued for resuming the six-party talks despite North Korea's provocative nuclear and missile tests. Moscow has steadily argued against military action, hinted that sanctions might be lifted if the DPRK rejoined the talks, suggested that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) become involved with this issue, and proclaimed its willingness to provide economic assistance (Baek 2009; Toloraya 2009). But it is Washington and Beijing, not Moscow, that will decide the issue of the talks for Pyongyang, signifying Russia's limited power to influence events here.

The breakdown of those talks also nullifies the discussions that Moscow sponsored about creating a multilateral security mechanism for Northeast Asia as part of the 2007 agreements, a long-standing point in Soviet and Russian foreign policy (Rangismaporn 2009, 230–34; Toloraya 2009, 77–79). As the former diplomat Georgy Toloraya (2009, 79) writes:

Russia sees a multiparty diplomatic process as essential for attaining the aforementioned objectives. The eventual creation of a regional (or sub-regional) system of security and cooperation in Northeast Asia would benefit Russia, as it would enable it to have a greater say in the area and create more opportunities to promote its own interests, including economic ones. Russia aspires to become a "Eurasian bridge" which would speed up the development of its Far Eastern regions and facilitate its deeper integration in the Asian economic space, and its development as an "Asian energy-power."

Absent such a mechanism, Moscow finds it harder to play a role in Northeast Asia as an independent competitive actor. Nonetheless, Moscow keeps devising formulas for regional conflict resolution because it now publicly admits to anxiety about the future security equation. Deputy Foreign Minister Alexei Borodavkin, Moscow's representative to the six-party talks, announced that Russia's discussions with the other five parties had led it to formulate a draft on "Guiding Principles for Peace and Security in Northeast Asia." ITAR-TASS reported on 18 December 2009 that Borodavkin admitted that existing conflicts in Korea and Afghanistan had worsened in 2009; consequently, Borodavkin said, "We proceed from the assumption that one of the most important prerequisites and components of the denuclearization process is the formation of regional common security institutions which would be based on the principle of equal security to all parties."

Such calls underscore Moscow's less than equal status that makes the success of such plans unlikely. But, as ITAR-TASS reported on 23 December 2009, Borodavkin further underscored Russia's genuine alarm about Korea by stating that the aggravation of Asian conflicts together with the global economic crisis have created a situation where, "Under current circumstances, peace and security in the region is a priority task because we believe that neither nuclear deterrence nor military deterrence may ensure security in this sub-region and in the entire world." That is, further North Korean provocations might push one or another actor over the edge, and Russia cannot do anything to stop it. Indeed, Moscow even deployed its new S-400 SAM to the RFE out of fear that North Korea might launch more missiles that either go awry or, worse, provoke a major conflict in Northeast Asia (RIA Novosti 2009b). For Borodavkin this danger means Russia must participate more actively in the region, and its activity has become more substantive, focused on economic integration, reported ITAR-TASS on 23 December 2009).

Borodavkin's remarks are only among the most recent remarks of a government that showed a mounting and wholly justified alarm (that word is not too strong) about the consequences of the breakdown of talks in 2008–09. In 2008 North Korea orally accepted the U.S. plan for verifying the dismantling of its nuclear capabilities, only to refuse to put that agreement in writing even though the Bush administration had fulfilled its side of the bargain by removing North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. Throughout 2009 Pyongyang insisted that it no longer cared about normalizing relations with Washington or the six-party talks. Pyongyang's proliferation and missile and nuclear tests in 2008–09 only aggravated tensions even before the *Cheonan* incident and led to the breakdown of the six-party talks.

Consequently Russian spokespersons, starting with Medvedev, have publicly stated that North Korea is a greater proliferation threat than Iran, exactly the reverse of U.S. thinking. Throughout 2009 one can see Russia's mounting anxiety about trends on the Korean peninsula in President Medvedev's statements about the situation there even before Borodavkin's remarks in December. In June 2009 Medvedev warned that the DPRK's April–May nuclear and missile tests had caused "great alarm and concern." He reiterated Moscow's constant point that there is no alternative to a negotiated solution and therefore that it is essential for North Korea to return to the table. He also advocated mechanisms to deter these programs by economic processes, that is, the UN resolutions adopted then (*BusinessWeek* 2009; Reuters 2009). In July 2009 Medvedev came out against further sanctions but warned that North Korea was different from Iran, indeed, more dangerous. He warned that tensions were building on the Korean peninsula and that North Korea, which was continuing its military programs, was more dangerous than Iran because it had suspended all of its contacts with its erstwhile negotiating partners and was essentially out of control (Medvedev 2009). By September he was warning about what might happen if the six-party talks on a nuclear North Korea did not resume (RIA Novosti 2009a). At about that time Moscow deployed its new S-400 SAM to the RFE as a result of fears that North Korea might launch more missiles that either go awry or even provoke a major conflict in Northeast Asia (RIA Novosti 2009b). And, reported ITAR-TASS on 23 December 2009, by late 2009 Russian officials were speaking about the DPRK in very alarmist terms as Borodavkin's remarks above demonstrate.

Borodavkin therefore argued in December 2009 that this danger means Russia must participate more actively in the region, and its activity has become more substantive, focused on economic integration. Furthermore, what is notable about this assessment is that Borodavkin and other officials have not advocated that any specific actions be taken against North Korea other than to implement the UN sanctions passed in 2009. Instead, Russia has followed the course of action laid out above concerning the six-party talks, sanctions, and opposing military action. In fact, Russian officials like Borodavkin and Ivashentsov openly blame the United States for the situation on the Korean peninsula. Thus Ivashentsov (2009b) wrote:

However, the aggravation of the nuclear problem of the Korean Peninsula cannot be viewed in isolation from the general world situation. As force is increasingly a factor in international relations, as ultimatums and sanctions are used on a wider scale and bloc policies are resuscitated, certain countries feel disadvantaged and seek to assure their security by any means, including the extreme ones.

Other Russian analysts like Yuri Fedorov (2010, 76; RIA Novosti 2010b) have noted this tendency to blame the United States for North Korea's intransigence and to see the Korean nuclear issue from the perspective of Moscow's broader relations with Washington.

In fact this tendency has been a long-standing one, to the point of gloating over the seeming loss by the United States demonstrated by its having to sign the six-party agreements negotiated in 2007 (Blank 2007). A recent analysis (Rozman 2007) of Russian reactions to the 13 February 2007 six-party agreement on North Korean denuclearization strongly suggests the continuation of this misanthropic view. Moscow's reasoning on the February 2007 deal conflicts with that of the Bush administration: (1) it came about as a result of the United States correcting its past mistaken diplomacy; (2) it is likely to fail because the United States will not fulfill its commitments; (3) the talks serve as a model of multilateralism, applying pressure only in extreme need through unanimous Security Council resolutions and encouraging diplomacy in which officials having good ties to all parties play the decisive role; and (4) at fault is a U.S. worldview that demonizes the North Korean regime in order to justify a strategy of global hegemony. Given this line of reasoning, Russians are inclined to interpret ambiguities in the timing of mutual steps in carrying out this deal as U.S. attempts to gain one-sided advantage (Rozman 2007). But none of this has helped gain Moscow any more leverage in Pyongyang or elsewhere.

Equally significantly, Borodavkin and other officials see the proliferation crisis as generating a need for regional and common security institutions based on equal security, that is, at the expense of U.S. leadership. In other words, this may be a deadly serious crisis threatening Russia's Asian territory, but it also offers opportunities for gains at Washington's expense, and these opportunities should duly be taken. Indeed, in 2008 Lavrov prefigured Medvedev's observations by saying that North Korea's nuclear weapons are a threat to international order, whereas Iranian nuclearization would not be such a threat (Blackwill 2008). At about this time Lavrov (quoted in Abelsky 2007, 52) also said:

The first problem is that we differ in our assessment of the threat of missile proliferation that is the target of the global system of anti-missile defense. . . . We have agreed that experts will focus on working out a common understanding of the present threat. And the second problem is that for the joint work of Russian and American experts to become more effective, it is necessary to "freeze" the new plan for the deployment of the new installations in Europe.



So, clearly the Korean example is not an anomalous case for Russia. Indeed, it fits perfectly with Alexei Arbatov's description at a 2008 conference of the mainspring of Russian thinking about proliferation (Arbatov 2009, 147–49):

For Russia the acquisition of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles by India and Pakistan and the prospects of further proliferation are adding some new elements to a familiar and old threat, rather than creating a dramatic new one, as is the case with the United States. The USSR and Russia have learned to live with this threat and to deal with it on the basis of nuclear deterrence, some limited defenses (like the Moscow BMD system and national Air Defenses) and through diplomacy, which is used to avoid direct confrontation (and still better, to sustain normal relations) with new nuclear nations.

### Conclusions

Russia's structural weakness in the RFE and the evolution of trends in the six-party process, North Korea's risk taking, and China's rising power all make Russia an object of other actors rather than the independent subject it wishes to be. The chasing after China and independent investigation of the *Cheonan* incident indicate Russia's fear of isolation. But it is beyond Moscow's present capability to alter this strategic condition by its own exertions or example. Indeed, in critical ways weakness reinforces weakness as in a vicious circle. North Korea's repeated examples of risk-acceptant behavior and brinkmanship underscore the Russian dilemma. Russian-language reporting by Ekho Moskvy News Agency on 20 May 2010 showed that at least some Russian experts believe that it is impossible to scare North Korea with sanctions. In that case, what then can the other parties do to it?

The well-known instances of proliferation abroad by the DPRK with its missiles and weapons of mass destruction sent to, for example, Syria, Iran, and Myanmar, also pose many dangers to Russia and the other members in the six-party process. As these sales constitute lucrative exports for North Korea, there is little reason to believe that the North will halt them anytime soon. Indeed, by 2007 North Korea had established itself as "the Third World's greatest supplier of missiles, missile components and related technologies" (Pinkston 2008, 57). Because North Korea demands an end to sanctions barring its arms trade as a precondition of returning to the talks, it clearly intends to continue these sales despite UN resolutions and other international mechanisms, like the Proliferation Security Initiative, to block them. And if these sales continue to such states

as Iran and Syria, then they ignite a regionwide crisis on another of Russia's doorsteps, namely the Middle East.

Second, while Russian intelligence probably picked up these sales to Syria, Iran, and other states or movements at some point, it is unlikely that North Korea informed Russia (or China) that it was conducting "illicit" nuclear cooperation with Syria and Iran.

This failure reflects not only North Korea's inflated nationalism but also its belief that whatever misunderstanding and disagreements it has with Russia and China—quite a few are known—both will continue their commitment and support, and the same goes for Syria (Shichor 2007, 81–82).

Thus North Korea's risk-acceptant behavior appears to be premised on the belief that not only will Russia and China ultimately restrain the United States from imposing truly serious punishments (be they sanctions or worse) upon North Korea, but that the United States will be unable or unwilling to use its full power to strike back at North Korea for these risky moves. This is a behavior that not only has allowed North Korea to get nuclear weapons without paying what it considers to be an unbearable price but also has exposed its supposed "backers" to the consequences of these great risks taken in disregard of their interests and without their knowledge or acceptance of the risks for them in that behavior (Kim and Kim 2007, 67–68). In conjunction with the likelihood that further incidents along the lines of the *Cheonan* incident might be in the offing, this kind of behavior could easily ignite the conflagration that Moscow, if not other capitals, most fears.

It is quite improbable that Moscow can welcome or simply passively accept this state of affairs that puts its interests at risk for Pyongyang's actions without seeking to make a countermove. Yet, as the present crisis shows, Moscow has virtually no leverage over any of the actors should they deliberately or by misunderstanding initiate actions that lead to genuine crisis if not actual conflict in Northeast Asia. Thus, the stalemate on the Korean peninsula exposes the reality behind Russian proclamations of great-power status, namely that Russia is there by sufferance of the real regional powers and has little influence over any of them, not least North Korea. For a would-be great power, a situation in which little or nothing can be done is not only unacceptable; it is humiliating and downright dangerous.

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