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Russia's Core Issues:

The entire “Korean problem,” as well as its nuclear “angle”, is a holdover of the Cold war era. No progress on any issue was marked here for years and even the constant specter of an imminent armed conflict is looming. North Korean nuclear conundrum remains, perhaps, the most pressing and controversial subject of the global politics where the nonproliferation problems (the fate of the NPT), regional (in)stability and historical ‘demons’ of American foreign policy are quaintly intertwined. Its nuclear feature makes it even more unsolvable.

Historically, Moscow was the major provider of Pyongyang’s nuclear and missile capabilities and since a kind of linchpin for the entire problem. Moscow, however, rejects the allegations that it was central in promoting the proliferation of WMD and delivery systems, technology, or expertise to the North Korean regime. Soviet leaders were very cautious not to be drawn into another major standoff with the US due to Kim’s temerity. Today Moscow is trying to re-establish itself as a principal arbiter of the crisis over the peninsula. Russia is fully aware that this crisis zone might once again bring about the danger of actual nuclear war. While real contribution of both Russia and China to the crisis settlement can be debated, it is now obvious that they are *sine qua non* participants of any negotiated outcome on this subject matter. These two former, if not present, mentors of North Korean “hermit kingdom’s rulers have the best understanding of the DPRK regime interior mechanics and thus could be rather helpful in any further-on solution regarding this state. Nonetheless, Moscow is well aware that Washington is seen in Pyongyang as the primary interlocutor and problem-solver.

Russia’s core approach is formulated in its March 24, 1994 MFA statement the key points of which are: convening of the multipartite conference on Koreas’ non-nuclear-weapons status which is bound to negotiate an overarching solution; military denuclearization of the peninsula; non-interference in domestic affairs; introduction of military-related confidence-building measures of any party; agreement on a new peace treaty to replace the anachronistic Armistice. Russia, as well as China, favors the restart of the Six-party process on the Korean issue on the basis of strict compliance with the Joint Statement of September 19, 2005. Russia urged the DPRK to re-enter the six-party format without any pre-conditions and on the basis of Joint Statement of September 19, 2005, to put a moratorium on nuclear testing, accept the IAEA inspectors in Yonbyon and to start discussing “the uranium dossier”. Russia, as well as China, is opposing the transfer of the Korean nuclear issues to the UNSC, preferring the Six-party format or any other current ad hoc alternative. Moscow is concerned with the evident lack of progress since July 2011 and the determined US intent to bring down the Pyongyang regime.

Russian vital interests in the region driving its security policy are clear-cut - she is “for everything benign and against anything menacing”. Due to the history and geography, Russia is essentially interested in the stability and peace in the area - thus favoring any pragmatic settlement of the problem and could become a dependable partner in any solutions put forward by the US. Russia would accede to a Northeast Asian Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, if the USA does the same.

Moscow is showing new efforts in enlarging its cooperative economic ties with Koreas in the framework of its novel interest to the presence in the Asian-Pacific region (trilateral energy, gas pipeline, railroad construction, infrastructure projects). However, all this is possible only after the ‘nuclear tangle’ is untied and ROK-DPRK relations are smoothed.

Six-party process, if re-launched, could end up in forming a peace mechanism in the NEA. This is very much in the vein of habitual Moscow approach transpired, for example, in M.Gorbachev’s initiative of 1988 to apply OSCE security arrangement format to Asia. Russia as the chairman the institutional Working group on a peace and security mechanism in the Six-party framework is actively cooperating with its partners what resulted in the adoption of the guiding principles of peace and security in the region. In this context Moscow considers crucial to work out a new peace legally-binding treaty which would seal the end of the Korean War and substitute the anachronistic Armistice document, bring legal dimensions to the regional security

settlement framework. Military commission is practically collapsed as well as the Neutral Nations Supervisory commission, UN Command (Korea) is dismantled by the 1975 UNGA resolution. A new thrust forward is needed and Moscow desires to participate in the work on such a document despite the reluctance of some states to see Moscow's role in this process. In the past Russia favorably-in its general approach - reacted to comprehensive security settlement proposed by the Bush-jr. administration, however this scheme was eclipsed by other foreign policy events and went muted.

According to Russia, the key issue now is a package solution: the implementation of 2005 Joint Statement by all the parties. Moscow sees the following path to the re-start to the Six-party process: advancement of the inter-Korean dialogue, resumption of Tokyo-Pyongyang dialogue, start of the trilateral (DPRK-ROK-Russia) economic cooperation projects, commencement of the practical implementation of the Russian proposal on the peace mechanism in NEA. At the same time, Moscow is nowadays striving to demonstrate its "impartiality" in Korean dossier, not slanting to any side.

On the specific issue of denuclearization Russia recently made certain practical steps, for example during Ulan-Ude meeting (August 2011) where Kim Jong Il agreed to return to the negotiations table without preconditions and once again expressed Pyongyang's readiness to a moratorium on nuclear and missile testing. Hopefully, it could happen, if new obstacles are not habitually raised by other parties.

Russia rejects the nuclear ambitions of the North Korean regime opining that the legitimate security concerns of Pyongyang can be resolved by political means and through a dialogue. Moscow is in principle against the advent of any new nuclear-weapons state and is proud to proclaim itself the staunchest proponent of the NPT. The nuclear-free-zone concept remains, however, a basic pillar of the NPT enforcement. Therefore, Moscow actively participated in the work on the UNSC resolutions 1718, 1874 and strives to strictly comply with them. At the same time, this is the Russian principle that Pyongyang should not be 'ostracized' but drawn into the constructive quest for pragmatic solution of the nuclear dilemma.

Russia is interested in a WMD-free zone in Korea. Moscow could accept any Six-party formula that might lead to a NEA-NWFZ. A NEA-NWFZ treaty as an integral part of the comprehensive security agreement that would include the termination of a state of war on the peninsula is a clear objective of the DPRK and is naturally supported by Russia. Russia will support a NWFZ as it is its usual attitude to such zones when they do not embrace the territory of Russia. Russia would agree to abide by the provisions of such a treaty and not to store nuclear weapons in the zone or support in any way violations of the treaty by the non-nuclear states. She also could agree not to threaten or use nuclear weapons against any non-nuclear state that was observing the terms of the treaty. Therefore Moscow will push for a text which in no way covers its nuclear forces in Siberia and the Far East and will be likely to ratify such a NEA NWFZ, if Washington does the same.

Moscow as a neighboring nuclear-weapons state seems to be ready to provide security assurances, as US must consider a new paradigm for the extended non-nuclear deterrence. Russia does not trust US assurances of lower stake on nuclear deterrence in Asia and is worried with the continuing US nuclear extended deterrence in the Northeast Asian region, which is now being enhanced with the joint ABM network. ABM issue (which has become Moscow's dreadful obsession) unites Russia and China in their intransigent rejection of this US program, especially, if supported by the participation of US allies, such as Japan or ROK. Theoretically, if Russia decides to retaliate with the deployment its own ABM system (there have been signals of Russian readiness to deploy S-400 batteries in the Far East to parry the Korean missile threat), if Mongolia, Japan, ROK, India do the same followed by Australia – all this could considerably neutralize the current Chinese missile capability. Although Russian MFA pledged the so-called "universalization" of the INF Treaty, it is very cautious to promote this idea in the NEA understanding that it vexes China as it would have nullified the bulk of Peking's missile force. Moscow is tacitly worried that the ongoing crisis inadvertently provokes ROK to seek its own

nuclear deterrent thus further undermining global proliferation norms (at least twice, after Park Chung Hee' regime, in the beginning of the 1980 s and in 2000 the South Koreans tried to conduct covert enrichment activities).

It is difficult to predict whether the DPRK could actually participate in good faith in any potential regional security arrangement, even if its regime is to soften and humanize with time. Of two schools of thought on what Pyongyang would eventually do with its nuclear weapons I belong to the pessimists camp and think that it is hardly plausible, (even after a bourgeois counterrevolution there which, arguably, could come after China is "de-communized") - but the horrendous outcome could be the unified Korea with the Southern technological prowess and the Northern weapons acumen.