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RUSSIA'S NONPROLIFERATION POLICY AND THE SITUATION IN EAST ASIAby Vladimir Orlov (1)
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ABSTRACT
Russia's firm and unequivocal commitment to nuclear and WMD nonproliferation is based on domestic factors. In the current geopolitical conditions (challenges coming from Chechnya and other southern neighbors), Russia will not be able to give an adequate response to new challenges on the part of new possessors of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, if emerged. Russia cannot afford to distract its resources to meet these potential threats that may emerge new its borders.
Occasional accusations of Russia's promoting proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems by official transfer of materials, technology and expertise to Middle East nations (Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya) and Northeast Asia (North Korea) have no grounds. A real problem is an insufficient level of sensitive export controls, above all in the area of missile components and technologies, as well as biotechnologies. Missile smuggling, brain drain, intangible proliferation-sensitive technology transfer - all this took place in the early 1990s. In the late 1990s, the export controls and smuggling prevention issues got in the focus of attention of Russian authorities and the situation began to improve. At the same time, our analysis make us call into question that all channels for illicit trafficking in sensitive technologies have been eliminated.
North Korean nuclear crisis demonstrated Russia's limited role in Northeast Asia in contrast to the role of the former Soviet Union played by Moscow during and after the Korean war. Russia's inability to affect the Korean nuclear program resulted in a situation when Russian leadership and governmental experts put up with the loss of Russia's role in solving North Korean nuclear problem, accepted their helplessness and blessed the USA for negotiations with Pyongyang.
Moscow made an attempt to improve relations and clarify the situation with North Korean missile intentions during President Putin's visit to Pyongyang in July. The visit was supposed to have "external effect" - to show the West that Russia was returning to its traditional spheres of influence to get some economic and political dividends. After his return from Pyongyang, President Putin admitted, "We hope that the results of my visit will serve all parties concerned. We do not want to monopolize these results."
However, with the new, republican, administration in Washington in office, the situation is likely to change. Top U.S. politicians have no plans to go to Pyongyang. Instead, they talk more in "stick" terms rather than in "carrot" ones. In this new context, Russia's increasing contacts with Pyongyang may play a positive and important role.

RUSSIAN NONPROLIFERATION POLICY AND NATIONAL INTERESTS
As a declared nuclear-weapon state (NWS) Russia has a core interest in preserving and strengthening the NPT and the nuclear nonproliferation regime. According to the National Security Concept approved in January 2000, the need for strengthening the nonproliferation of WMD and their delivery systems is "the primary task in the area of maintaining national security", while WMD proliferation is considered to be one of the major threats to the national security and Russia's interests (2).
It is interesting that, according to the results of the all-Russian public opinion poll conducted at the request of the PIR Center, 78% of Russians (evidently, emotionally and not as experts) support the continued nuclear nonproliferation endeavors.
Even throughout the most terrible economic difficulties, Russia has never directly or indirectly violated Article I of the NPT and has not transferred nuclear weapons or their components to other states. Russia complied with Article IV concerning the assistance to the non-nuclear weapon states in providing peaceful technologies and the construction of the nuclear power plant in Bushehr (Iran) should be considered in this context.
Like the USA, Russia also had the proliferation temptations. But unlike the US temptations - the desire to play the role of the only superpower (sometimes without knowing when to stop and with breaching the international norms) - the Russian temptations were weak and related to the loss of the Great Power status. So far, one can say that Russia has managed to resist this temptation. "Russia demonstrates its firm commitment to strengthen export controls and WMD nonproliferation regime," stated President Putin. – "Russia believes that the NPT is one of the pillars of international security system. The NPT is the fundamental mechanism preventing nuclear arms proliferation and promoting international cooperation in the area of peaceful nuclear energy uses." (3).
Russia's firm and unequivocal commitment to nuclear and WMD nonproliferation is based on domestic factors. In the current geopolitical conditions (challenges coming from Chechnya and other southern neighbors), Russia will not be able to give an adequate response to new challenges on the part of new possessors of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, if emerged. Russia cannot afford to distract its resources to meet these potential threats that may emerge new its borders.
Even when the US-Russian relations cooled down (NATO expansion, NATO aggression against Yugoslavia) and there were real chances to irritate the USA, Russia has never dared to play the nonproliferation card, believing it would be an extremely dangerous game.
Thus, occasional accusations of Russia's promoting proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems by official transfer of materials, technology and expertise to Middle East nations (Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya) and Northeast Asia (North Korea) have no grounds.
A real problem is an insufficient level of sensitive export controls, above all in the area of missile components and technologies, as well as biotechnologies. Missile smuggling, brain drain, intangible proliferation-sensitive technology transfer - all this took place in the early 1990s (4). In the late 1990s, the export controls and smuggling prevention issues got in the focus of attention of Russian authorities and the situation began to improve (5). At the same time, our analysis make us call into question that all channels for illicit trafficking in sensitive technologies have been eliminated.
We may conclude that in the next few years there is a high possibility of missile technology and conventional arms smuggling to a number of states, above all in the East Asia and the Middle East.
At the same time, this is not the matter of state indulgence to illegal supplies, but the problem of insufficient capabilities of the state to prevent such attempts at the customs level, especially within the Customs Union of the CIS.
Russian and US interests in tightening control over WMD proliferation-sensitive export objectively coincide (6). Although in the recent years Washington has been exerting pressure on Russia in this area (for a number of domestic policy reasons) and this pressure negatively affected US-Russian nonproliferation dialogue, one can expect that Russia will be interested in maintaining productive and continuous dialogue with the USA on key nonproliferation issues, which would replace the petty quarrels (7).
Russia and East Asian Proliferation Threats: North Korea
One of the elements of Russia's nonproliferation policy is reducing current and avoiding potential challenges in East Asia related to weapons of mass destruction.
The situation in East Asia is determined by a complicated combination of military and political factors.
Firstly, there is a recognized NWS in the region - China, which possesses nuclear weapons and intermediate- and long-range delivery systems.
Secondly, there is, at least, one state that has an officially declared non-nuclear status but has all military-technical and industrial capabilities to develop a nuclear weapon program; this is Japan. The latter carries out a program of stockpiling plutonium officially designated for peaceful nuclear energy uses. This program causes some apprehensions of international community (8).
Thirdly, there are, at least, two hotbeds of military-political confrontation - on the Korean peninsula, where complicated negotiations between North and South Korea are under way (commenced in June 2000 after the Pyongyang meeting of the leaders of two Koreas), and between China and Taiwan (9).
The most WMD-proliferation-sensitive issue has become development of the North Korean nuclear and missile programs.
North Korean nuclear crisis demonstrated Russia's limited role in Northeast Asia in contrast to the role of the former Soviet Union played by Moscow during and after the Korean war. In Soviet times, the USSR assisted Pyongyang in developing its peaceful nuclear energy capabilities. The Soviet Union supplied North Korea with a small enriched-uranium research reactor, which became operational in 1966 and was under IAEA safeguards. However, the USSR never facilitated North Korea in developing any components of its nuclear weapons program and for some time (in the late 1970s-early 1980s) was even unaware of such Pyongyang's plans.
The USSR facilitated North Korean accession to the NPT (1985), taking advantage of Pyongyang's interest in building nuclear power plant with the help of the Soviet Union.
In December 1985, the parties signed a Pyongyang-sponsored agreement on constructing a nuclear power plant with 4 VVER-440 reactors. In 1992, Russia cleared up that it would supply 3 MP-640-type reactors, which seemed to be safer. Construction started near Sinp'o, Russia finished technical study and Russian specialists began their field activities. Besides, in 1991, the USSR and the DPRK signed a $185-million contract concerning fuel assembly supplies (10).
In the late 1980s-early 1990s, peaceful nuclear cooperation of the two states faced some problems, which, in fact, had nothing to do with nonproliferation. The DPRK refused to make payments to Russia, since Pyongyang did not recognize it as the Soviet successor (11).
First evidence of North Korean nuclear ambitions was obtained by US intelligence satellites in 1984. In 1986, the satellites made threatening pictures of Yongbyon reactor. And in December 1988, Washington initiated its first cautious dialogue with Pyongyang concerning this topic (12).
In 1986, North Korea started to operate its indigenous 5-MW gas-cooled graphite-moderated reactor with capabilities for plutonium production. It also commenced the construction of two more powerful industrial reactors to develop capabilities for the reprocessing of irradiated nuclear fuel and the separation of weapons-usable plutonium.mIn 1989, North Korea was suspected of recharging nuclear reactor, reprocessing discharged nuclear fuel and obtaining about 12 kg of weapons-usable plutonium. This amount was enough to manufacture a couple of nuclear warheads (13).
In 1988-1994, the USSR and later Russia regarded the North Korean nuclear program as one of the most serious regional nonproliferation challenges contradicting Soviet/Russian interests in the region. At the time, the USSR and then Russia were not able to control development of Pyongyang's military nuclear program and did not have any significant impact on North Korea's activities. Moscow tended to believe that North Korea did not possess any nuclear explosive devices (14) and that the program was frozen (allegedly since 1992). Nonetheless, there was no accurate data and this lack of information sometimes increased Russia's suspicions (15). In the secret report, KGB experts had provided the following assessment: "From a reliable source, the KGB has received information that scientific and experimental design work on the development of atomic weapons is actively continuing in the DPRK. According to this data, the development of the first atomic explosive device has been completed at the Institute of Nuclear Research of the DPRK, located in Yongbyon… For the time being, tests are planned in the interests of hiding the fact of the DPRK's production of an atomic weapon from the world community and from international organizations responsible for nuclear safeguards" (16).
In 1993, in its public report, Russian Foreign Intelligence service maintained that while the DPRK's applied military nuclear program is at "an advanced stage", it also expressed "serious doubts" that the DPRK has made "any breakthrough" in developing its own nuclear weapons yet (17).
Another SVR report published in March 1995 maintained that "the present scientific and technical level and the technological equipment of nuclear facilities in the DPRK do not allow North Korea specialists to create a nuclear explosive device applicable for field tests, even less so to model a cold test of a plutonium-type military-purpose charge under laboratory conditions" (18). In his interview to the author, head of the SVR Arms Control and WMD Nonproliferation Department Lt.-Gen. Gennady Evstafiev assessed North Korean nuclear weapons program as approaching the stage of creating nuclear explosive device but failing to do so due to domestic financial difficulties and a number of other problems (19).
Immediately after North Korean statement concerning its withdrawal from the NPT, the Russian president signed a decree No. 249-RP banning all works under the 1985 agreement. At that time, Pyongyang's debt was about $1.72 million (20) (later estimates spoke about $4.7 million (21)).
At the same time, according to Russian leading expert on North Korea Yevgeny Bazhanov, "the Russian government... was too preoccupied with its various internal crises to pay much attention to… obscure developments in the DPRK" (22).
To sum it up, one can presume that Russia had a vague picture of North Korean nuclear program and could hardly understand whether signals concerning rapid progress of the Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program proved that North Korea had started technological implementation of corresponding political decision, or it was a deliberate North Korean disinformation to be used later for nuclear bluff and blackmail (23).
Russia's inability to affect the Korean nuclear program resulted in a situation when Russian leadership and governmental experts put up with the loss of Russia's role in solving North Korean nuclear problem, accepted their helplessness and blessed the USA for negotiations with Pyongyang. These talks ended with signing the Agreed Framework in October 1994. One of the Russian leading experts then admitted, "There is no price that would not be worth paying for refusal of any rogue state to acquire nuclear capabilities." (24) As a result, Washington, Japan and South Korea willingly paid this price.
In the late 1990s, Russia took several attempts to participate in the nonproliferation dialogue in the region. All these endeavors have failed. In nuclear area, Russia has missed the KEDO train, even the last car of it. Russian initiative to build a nuclear power plant for North Korea on the territory of Primorsky krai (the safest possible scenario as far as nonproliferation is concerned) has got no response.
The North Korean nuclear weapons program was not the only headache for Russia caused by the DPRK.
Sweeping development of the North Korean missile program, which started from modification of the Soviet Scuds and continued by creating Nodong-1 (with foreign assistance) and Taepodong-1 (tested in August 1998 (25)), led to three new challenges facing Russian military and political leadership.
Firstly, at the Russian eastern border, there emerged a state with an advanced program of developing WMD launchers that may reach the Russian territory. Russia cannot but interpret this as a direct threat to national security and national interests. Test launch of a Taepodong-1 missile in 1998 caused painful reaction of the Russian media and experts, since the first stage of the missile fell in the Sea of Japan close to the Russian territory, whereas the Russian early-warning system failed to detect the launch. Russian sentiments were clearly stated in the following headline of a nation-wide newspaper "North Korea demonstrates vulnerability of our defense" (26).
Secondly, North Korean missile export capabilities pose the threat of secondary missile proliferation (27) and may pose potential threats to Russia in other regions of the world neighboring its territory or the territory of its allies under the Collective Security Treaty.
Thirdly, North Korean missile threat has become a key trump card for those US policymakers who lobby deployment of national missile defense (NMD) system. Russia regards NMD deployment as a major menace to its national security. If implemented, the system will undermine the 1972 ABM Treaty which Moscow considers to be the cornerstone of strategic stability.
In the late 1990s, many Russian experts agreed (regardless of different estimates) that "particular role of the North Korean threat for Russian national security and for security of other Asia-Pacific nations is determined by aggravating political and economic instability in the DPRK, whose leadership is notorious for its unpredictability and can undertake military adventures to ensure overall victory of its ... ideology, sacrificing the cause of peace, the interests of the neighbors and its own people. Evidence of North Korean efforts to develop missiles and arm them with nuclear warheads deserve particular attention and endeavors to seek the solution to this dangerous situation" (28).
Moscow made an attempt to improve relations and clarify the situation with North Korean missile intentions during President Putin's visit to Pyongyang in July 2000 (this was the first visit of the Soviet/Russian leader to North Korea). The visit was supposed to have "external effect" - to show the West that Russia was returning to its traditional spheres of influence to get some economic and political dividends. In case of North Korea, it was not the matter of economic benefits. Moscow did not hope for political breakthrough either and therefore, none expected any significant practical results from this meeting. On the eve of the visit President Putin explained his mission: "The DPRK is our neighbor, we have a common border. And it is crucial for us to be sure that peace and concord are restored in the region, since this will directly affect Russia." (29) "We know that the situation on the Korean peninsula is still dangerous and Russia is interested to avoid any dangerously explosive situation near its borders. This is our national, state interest. And my visit to Korea is connected with these problems, with our direct national interests." (30) After that Vladimir Putin specified a secret goal of the visit, which was hardly connected with inter-Korean settlement. "In the course of discussion on global security issues we heard an argument concerning various military and missile threats, and the DPRK is more and more often mentioned in this connection. Obviously, we want to get to the country for a field study of the problem"(31).
Mr. Putin himself made a moderate assessment of his visit to Pyongyang and reminded everybody of his intelligence past. "In my opinion, the fewer blank pages we have the better. In order to understand what is going on, one should have contacts, ties, information. If we hear that there are some apprehensions concerning missile programs being developed by North Korea, we should know what these programs are, what their scale is and what the scale of the threat is. Strategic stability issues are chiefly discussed by the USA and Russia, but fate of other nations depend on how adequate our vision will be and how thoroughly we will prepare the decision. Thus, to obtain a high-quality solution to these problems, we should possess credible information." (32)
"I'm content with the results of the visit," he continued, "Naturally, one can hardly make any global and final conclusions as a result of two-day negotiations and meetings. However, without contacts and additional information, it is impossible to make any conclusions at all. (…) I have an impression that the Korean leader can listen and hears what he is told. He has adequate reaction to arguments in the course of discussion. And he can be a partner at negotiations, he is the person you can have dialogue with." (33)
Moscow noticed that Kim Jong-il used Putin as a messenger for North Korean peace initiative, while he himself wanted to talk to those who have money and real influence on entire complex of processes in Northeast Asia, i.e. with Americans. North Korea, like in 1994, does not accept Russia idea of internationalization of inter-Korean process (the only way for Russia to be involved in all settlement processes). Like in 1993-1994, Pyongyang prefers to solve the problems (now not nuclear, but missile) with those who pay and, unlike in 1994, plays the Russian card for that purpose: if the USA does not want to buy the glory of peacemakers, this glory will be offered to Russia with a discount (34).
After his return from Pyongyang, President Putin admitted, "We hope that the results of my visit will serve all parties concerned. We do not want to monopolize these results." (35)
Russia's realistic approach accounts for the fact that several weeks after Moscow's "missile settlement" victory in North Korea Russia ceded the initiative to the USA, although this success might have helped Moscow to solve the ABM/NMD issues. The US-North Korean negotiations in Kuala Lumpur, visit of a North Korean top-ranking official to Washington and finally, Madeleine Albright's visit to Pyongyang in October 2000 - all this demonstrated Pyongyang's consent to settle the missile issue with Washington only, without giving key to this problem to Moscow, Tokyo, Beijing or Seoul.
However, with the new, republican, administration in Washington in office, the situation is likely to change. Top U.S. politicians have no plans to go to Pyongyang. Instead, they talk more in "stick" terms rather than in "carrot" ones. In this new context, Russia's increasing contacts with Pyongyang may play a positive and important role.

CONCLUSIONS
Summing up Russian policy during the North Korean missile and nuclear crises, one can make the following conclusions:
* At the governmental level, Russia has never had political intentions or practice of promoting nuclear-weapon programs of the states of concern, including the DPRK. Any attempts of the lobbying groups and individuals to circumvent these restrictions have been always immediately prevented. There were only some efforts of enterprises and smugglers to make unauthorized supplies, but in nuclear area all these endeavors have failed.
* On the contrary, Russia has always feared even gossip about possible emergence of nuclear instability near its borders. When these rumors are proved with information, Russia exclaims such magic words as "NPT" or "IAEA inspections" to protect itself from any new headache.
* Russia has no sufficient information resources to get an adequate vision of the situation with new possible proliferation risks, especially in East Asia, and prefers to play safe proceeding from the worst-case scenario.
* Russia has neither financial resources nor political instruments to affect the policy of the states of concern, although sometimes Moscow deliberately bluffs.
* Russia's declared foreign policy priorities do not enable Moscow to recognize in public some of its concerns about nuclear-weapon programs of other states. Absence of public statements does not mean that there are no concerns and fears.
* The US persistent pressure and meddling in Russian affairs causes growing irritation in Moscow, although the Kremlin realizes that this pressure is a showoff for the US domestic audience and lobbying groups. At the same time, Moscow has no opportunity to make efficient steps aimed at preventing proliferation risks.
* One cannot preclude that Putin's pragmatic approach may mean Russia's willingness to develop nuclear cooperation even if there is a danger of violating or non-complying in full scope with international commitments. However, this is true only with respect to the states that are regarded as Russian long-term strategic partners and not as potential sources of threats to Russian security. This is why even if Russia had capabilities and willingness to meet the demands of the states of concern it would provide nuclear assistance neither to East Asia (China and North Korea) nor to the Middle East (Iran, Syria, and Libya). The only exception for deep cooperation would be India.

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(2) The Concept of National Security of the Russian Federation. January 2000. Diplomaticheshy Vestnik, No.2, 2000, p.4.
(3) Yaderny Kontrol. No.5, 2000. September – October, p. 40.
(4) Dmitry Evstafiev and Vladimir Orlov, Editors. Export Controls in Russia: Policies and Practicies (in Russian). M., PIR Center, 2000, pp. 143-156.
(5) Ibid., p. 184.
(6) Ibid., pp. 26, 29.
(7) Roland Timerbaev and Vladimir Orlov. Concerted Action Needed on Nonproliferation. Moscow Times. April 19, 2000, p.9.
(8) Katahara Elichi. Japan's Plutonium Policy: Consequences for Non-Proliferation. The Non-Proliferation Review, Vol.5, No.1, Fall 1997, p.57.
(9) During the 1960-1980s, Taiwan was conducting extensive nuclear research and developed a mighty nuclear energy sector. One may also presume that Taiwan was implementing imitative nuclear weapons program, which had no chances for success, bearing in mind Taiwan's dependence on the USA.
(10) Georgy Kaurov. A Technical History of Soviet-North Korean Nuclear Relations. In: The North Korean Nuclear Program, p. 18.
(11) Ibid., p. 19.
(12) David Reese. The Prospects for North Korea's Survival. Adelphi Paper 323. L., IISS, 1998, pp. 43-44.
(13) North Korean plutonium estimates can be found in: David Albright et al. Plutonium and Highly Enriched Uranium 1996. World Iventories, Capabilities, and Policies. Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 282-308.
(14) Mikhail Morozov. Atomnuyu bombu v tyomnom podzemelye nayti poka ne udalos' (No clandestine atomic bomb has been found yet). Komsomolskaya Pravda, July 13, 1994.
(15) See: Denisov, p.26
(16) Izvestia, June 24, 1994.
(17) Novyi vyzov posle kholodnoy voyny: rasprostraneniye oruzhiya massovogo unichtozheniya (The New Post-Cold War Clallenge: Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction). SVR Report. M., 1993, p.92-93.
(18) Dogovor o nerasprostranenii yadernogo oruzhiya. Problemy prodleniya. (Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. Problems of Extension.). SVR Report. M., 1995, p. 26.
(19) Interview with the author. November 1994.
(20) Ibid., p. 19
(21) Alexander Zhebin. A Political History of Soviet-North Korean Nuclear Cooperation. In: The North Korean Nuclear Program, p.33.
(22) Evgeniy P. Bazhanov. Military Strategic Aspects of the North Korean Nuclear Program. In: The North Korean Nuclear Program, p. 105.
(23) About nuclear blackmail see: Reese, p. 47. See also conclusions of the article by Vladimir Belous "How much plutonium did Kim Il Sung have in its pocket?". Segodnya, August 26, 1994.
(24) Gennady Evstafiev. Nine questions concerning nuclear nonproliferation. Yaderny Kontrol, No. 1, 1995, p. 13.
(25) The missile traveled 1,646 km across the Sea of Japan and released a small satellite which failed to achieve orbit. The first two stages of the missile were liquid-fueled but the third stage was reportedly a solid-fuel booster. Although it appears that the third stage failed, the accomplishment of the first two stages was impressive enough. Western experts have speculated that the missile has a potential range of some 2,000 – 2,500 km and could lead to the development of the Taepodong-2 missile. Russian military experts are more skeptical of North Korea's capabilities to move quickly beyond the August 1998 test to longer-range systems. – Evgeniy P. Bazhanov. Military Strategic Aspects of the North Korean Nuclear Program. In: The North Korean Nuclear Program, p. 104; Terese Delpech. Nuclear Weapons and the 'New World Order': Early Warning from Asia? Survival, Winter 198-99,vol. 40, No.4, p. 64; The Proliferation Primer. A Majority Report to the Subcommittee on International Security, Proliferation, and Federal services, Committee on Governmental Affairs, US Senate, January 1998, pp. 32-35; Author's interview with Gennady Khromov, a Glavkosmos expert, November 2000.
(26) Victor Litovkin. North Korea demonstrates vulnerability of our defense. Izvestiya, September 2,1998, p. 3.
(27) Gennady Evstafiev. It's naive to expect easy solutions. In: Export Controls in Russia: Policy and Practice, p. 188; Bazhanov, p. 105.
(28) Yaderny Kontrol, No. 3, May-June 2000, p.84.
(29) Interview of Russian President Vladimir Putin to correspondents of ORT, Japanese TV-company NHK and Reuters news agency. July 11, 2000. www.gov.ru/president
(30) Press conference in the International Media Center concerning results of the G-8 Summit. July 23, 2000, Okinawa
(31) Ibid.
(32) Ibid.
(33) Ibid.
(34) According to Russian journalist Alexander Platkovsky, "in the coming years, full-scale efforts at exploiting the differences among the major powers active on the Korean peninsula is the main field where Pyongyang will attempt to reap its harvest". – Platkovskiy, p. 100.
(35) Ibid.

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