

THE SIX PARTY TALKS: A RUSSIAN PERSPECTIVE

Georgy Toloraya

Russia has had a consistent policy of promoting a nuclear-free Korean peninsula, opposing resolution of the nuclear issue through pressure or sanction, supporting a multilateral process and solution, promoting adherence to Non-Proliferation Treaty rules, and expanding mutually beneficial economic cooperation. Moscow first suggested initiating a six-party process regarding a solution to the divided Korean peninsula in 1994. North Korea is generally positive about Russia's suggestions. The United States has belatedly and reluctantly recognized Russia's positive role in the process. Russia hopes the Six Party Talks (6PT) will gradually evolve into a multiparty security and cooperation system including a peaceful DPRK. This will be facilitated by international economic assistance to the DPRK and institutionalization of the 6PT. Successful Russia-U.S. cooperation may have much wider implications.

Key words: Russian foreign policy in Korea, North Korea, multilateral security – East Asia, nuclear weapons

Early Russian Efforts to Promote Collective Security in Korea

On March 24, 1994 the Russian foreign ministry made public a suggestion for a six-party conference involving the two Koreas,

the United States, China, Russia, and Japan. The United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) were also supposed to join the discussion on Korea for finding a compromise solution to the “first” North Korean nuclear crisis. That crisis began in March 1993 when the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), suspected of nuclear-weapon development, left the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).¹

The proposed comprehensive solution in Korea was meant to include:

- promoting nuclear nonproliferation in Korea;
- guarantees of noninterference in the internal affairs of the two Korean states;
- military confidence-building measures;
- replacement of the 1953 Korean armistice agreement with a new peace treaty; and
- normalization of bilateral relations between certain members of the talks (U.S.-DPRK, DPRK-Japan).²

The idea itself was not new. After the end of the Korean War the armistice agreement of 1953 recommended that the governments of the countries concerned hold a conference to solve the problem of withdrawal of all foreign forces from Korea and reach a peace agreement. The idea of a six-party “consultative conference” raised during the 43rd session of the UN General Assembly was first proposed by South Korea and was supported by Japan.³

Russia’s support for the process was based on the presumption that the Korean security issue (including the nuclear problem) was rooted in the long history of relations between the four powers (Japan, USSR, United States, and China) on the Korean issue. Historically, imperial Japan was the colonial master of Korea and only its defeat in World War II by the United States and the USSR brought about Korean independence. The United States and the USSR agreed on the division of Korea at Yalta in

-
1. Institute of International Economic and Political Studies, *Russia and Asian Countries: Policy and Cooperation in Mid-1990s* (Moscow, 1996), p. 73.
 2. Valery Denisov, “The Problem of Nuclear Security on Korean Peninsula,” online at www.nasledie.ru/oboz/N03_96/3_06.htm.
 3. Georgiy D. Toloraya, “Crisis Prevention in Korea,” in Vladimir I. Ivanov and Karla S. Smith, eds., *Japan and Russia in Northeast Asia* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1999), p. 134.

1945. Soon after, however, they became adversaries in the course of the Korean War, which also involved China. The cold-war confrontation was the product of the global competition between two systems: the USSR and China, both of which, although at odds with each other, had alliance treaties with the DPRK and supported Pyongyang, versus the U.S.-Japan-South Korea bloc. This system provided the security balance on the peninsula.

Thus, the 1994 Russian suggestion was not spontaneous and was prompted by Russia's attempt to protect its national interests. However, at that time it was ignored. As Samuel Kim puts it: "Being left out of the Chinese bilateral approach and marginalized by US hegemonic sanctions, Russia was attempting to get back into the game. . . . Washington dismissed the Russian proposal as a harmful distraction while Beijing scuttled it as deviating from its declared party line."⁴ Instead, a 2+2 formula (the two Koreas, the United States, and China) formula was implemented, in 1996, rebuffing Russian attempts to be involved.

This format was introduced without consultations with Moscow. In fact, Russian diplomats learned about it almost by chance from South Koreans. The U.S. verdict at that time was that "the major powers have not found Russia a useful partner in responding to the dangers confronting them [in Korea]."⁵ That became a painful reminder to Russia that despite its good intentions for collective efforts aimed at achieving collective security in Asia, its interests were not taken into account. The episode weakened the positions of "pro-Westerners" in the Russian Asia-related foreign-policy establishment and the calls for a "balanced" policy (embracing North Korea). "Standing on two feet" in the Korean peninsula gained force.⁶

4. Samuel S. Kim, "The Emerging Northeast Asian Order," *New Asia*, vol. 2, No. 4 (Winter, 1995), p. 37.

5. Nicholas Eberstadt and Richard Ellings., eds., *Korea's Future and the Great Powers* (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 2001), p. 164.

6. "The current situation [in Korea] vividly demonstrates the complete fiasco of Russian policy on the Peninsula. The problems vitally important for Russia are solved without considering our interests and even without our participation. . . . Being sure that a passive position in an issue of such an importance to our country is unacceptable we consider it necessary to resume the high-level dialogue with the DPRK in nearest future." So said the ultranationalistic chairman of the Duma Committee

Russia nevertheless adhered to the idea of a multiparty settlement. After 1994 Moscow consistently promoted the idea of six-party negotiations for a Korean settlement as a part of its Asian strategy. The Russian side argued that it was logical to consider the interests of all the parties and to ensure the legitimacy of the agreements reached. However, as the Russian role is traditionally viewed in the West with suspicion, based on long-term geopolitical prejudices, these ideas met with a lukewarm response throughout the 1990s. During this U.S.-North Korean bilateral relations determined the situation on the peninsula. At the same time the U.S.-Japan-South Korea trilateral consultation mechanism (TCOG) permitted the latter two countries to influence decision making. Meanwhile, China used its leverage to influence North Korea to some degree, and this reality pushed the United States to consider China an important dialogue partner on the Korean issue.

Russian Diplomacy in the Second Nuclear Crisis

The four-party process soon broke down, which was not totally unexpected by Russian experts. Nevertheless after the second nuclear crisis broke out in 2002, the United States made a point of trying to lure its allies and opponents alike into a coordinated framework and “reinvented” the idea of a multilateral settlement. Some Russian experts believed the chief goal was to build a partnership with China to influence it and to “encircle” North Korea by applying pressure from all participants in the talks. If that was the case, Russia with its ideology of a multipolar world was obviously not a welcome member. It supported China strategically and opposed pressure tactics against Pyongyang. Despite Russia’s contribution to the philosophy of an eventual multilateral settlement and its well-known position, the other participants did not include Russia.⁷ Moscow openly expressed its desire to be a part of this process but was rebuffed under the pretext that North Korea did not mention the need for its participation. Actually, the North Koreans wanted a bilateral dialogue

on Geopolitics, A. Mitrofanov, in *Pulse Planety*, Moscow, April 4, 1996.

7. *Vremya Novostei*, July 23, 2003.

with the United States, but this was opposed by Russia.⁸

When, however, North Korea finally agreed to the idea of multilateral talks, its approach changed. It was Kim Jong Il who insisted on Russia's participation in the talks when the United States brought up the issue of giving Japan a seat at the table. Obviously, Pyongyang wanted a more balanced composition of the members of the talks and also wanted to exploit rivalries among them. "It is a struggle to break the country's excessive dependence on China," former ROK Unification Minister Park Jae-gyu pointed out.⁹

Regarding the Russian contribution to the vision of the talks' mission and their philosophy, it should be remembered that in December 2002, only weeks after the crisis erupted and the DPRK restarted its nuclear program and withdrew from the NPT, the Russian foreign ministry officially suggested a "package solution."¹⁰ After fruitless years of a tug of war between Pyongyang and Washington, the modalities of negotiations and the compromise in 2006-2007 (as finally agreed on February 13, 2007) followed almost precisely the Russian proposals made at the end of 2002.

A New Russian Proposal

The main elements of the Russian-suggested "package" of January 2003 included about a dozen synchronized steps, starting with mutual simultaneous declarations on the DPRK's possible return to a nuclear freeze and U.S. readiness to resume the supply of heavy oil. The proposal also called for bilateral consultations aimed at agreeing on the current status of the Agreed Framework of October 1994 and what to do with it. At a more advanced stage, it was suggested that the United States and the DPRK make a list of their concerns with and demands from each other and exchange them. At this stage, the "co-sponsors" (Russia, China, South Korea, and Japan) would jointly analyze these lists

8. *RBK News Agency* (Munich), February 12, 2005.

9. "Pyongyang's New Equidistant Diplomacy with China and Russia," *Donga Ilbo* (Seoul), March 21, 2005.

10. Press statement, Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesman, December 1, 2003.

and exchange views as to what was realistic and what was not and advise the two parties accordingly. With their help the DPRK and the United States could determine what to start with and what to leave for the future.

Of course, the *minimum minimore* was the DPRK's return to the NPT, its denouncement of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and firm U.S. guarantees of noninfringement on DPRK sovereignty and security. Co-sponsors would have acted as guarantors of strict fulfillment of these obligations by both parties, because neither Washington nor Pyongyang seemed to put much trust in the UN or international law. In the future, the DPRK and the United States could proceed to full normalization and an end to hostilities.¹¹ Russia's proposal not only envisaged a multilateral diplomatic process but also called for a much more active role for the four partner parties besides the United States and the DPRK in the political settlement than actually transpired.

Thus, Russia's eventual inclusion in the six-party format in June 2003 was the result of a consistent Russian policy based on long-term concepts of a Korean settlement and an Asia-Pacific security paradigm. The concept of a multilateral peace settlement in Northeast Asia is generally based on the conviction that all members of the six-party mechanism have overlapping sets of common goals: for North Korea, security and aid not excluding eventual denuclearization (this is said to be Kim Il Sung's testament); for the others, denuclearization, not excluding—at least publicly—security and aid for North Korea.

11. The Russian president's special envoy, Alexander Losuykov, personally delivered these proposals to Kim Jong Il between January 18-21, 2003. Russia strongly expressed its position in favor of a non-nuclear Korea while North Korea stressed that although it was prepared for a worst-case scenario, the easy solution was to start a dialogue with the United States. This position as well as the Russian "package proposals" were immediately delivered to the United States through Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage. See *Diplomaticheskii Vestnik* (Moscow), No. 2 (2003), pp. 44-50.

Russia at the Six Party Talks

The Russian Position

Basically, the Russian position on the DPRK nuclear issue and the Six Party Talks (6PT) can be summarized as follows.

- The DPRK's acquisition of nuclear weapons deals a severe blow to the nuclear nonproliferation regime, which can have dangerous consequences for Russian security both in the Far East and quite distant areas.¹² Shortly before the DPRK nuclear test, Russia's military chief of staff, General Yuri Baluyevsky, stressed that "it is necessary to do everything possible in order not to allow North Korea to conduct [nuclear] tests; it is necessary to do everything for the resumption of the six-party talks on this problem. It is necessary to do everything in order that the Korean peninsula never becomes an arena of the use of nuclear weapons."¹³ Russia believes the Korean peninsula should be free from all nuclear weapons.
- Russia is strongly against any attempts to solve the nuclear issue through pressure or sanctions and would use its influence to prevent external interference or attempts for a regime change. Russia stresses that the five parties and international bodies (the UN) must guarantee North Korean security and stop threatening the DPRK. Relations between North Korea and other countries should be finally normalized.
- Moscow suggests that the eventual solution to the Korean issue should be found within the multiparty diplomatic process and the ideas of a "package solution" should become the basis for it.¹⁴ Military tension should be decreased, and confidence-build-

12. Michael Berk observes: "Regarding regional security, Russia does not in principle want the DPRK to gain a military nuclear capability, as this could cause a 'chain reaction,' leading Japan and South Korea to do so as well." Michael Berk, "Russia's Perspective on the DPRK and Regional Security," CIIA, February 23, 2007, in *Cankor.Sa*. No. 274 (February 26, 2007).

13. *ITAR-TASS*, May 24, 2005.

14. For example, reacting in February 2005 to the DPRK foreign ministry's statement on the desire to acquire a "nuclear deterrent," the official Russian representatives expressed concern regarding the decision of Pyongyang to cease its participation in the 6PT for an indefinite period and to accumulate nuclear military potential. The Russians stated that

ing measures should be implemented. A new permanent peace regime should be established on the peninsula that guarantees equal security for all the countries.

- Russia stresses that the DPRK should obey the NPT rules, and verification and guarantees of denuclearization should be based on international law. At the same time, as all countries have the right to develop modern energy technologies, including nuclear energy, Russia would support development of a peaceful nuclear program in the DPRK, including possible construction of light water reactors (LWR).¹⁵ As the chief of the Russian nuclear energy agency stated in November 2005, Russia does not exclude its participation in LWR construction as a part of a multinational consortium¹⁶ if the DPRK would return to the NPT.

Reactions to the Russian Proposal

North Korea approved of these Russian suggestions and used them for working out its own position for the Six Party Talks. Russian officials later pointed out that “at the three-party talks in April 2003 in Beijing, North Koreans handed over to the United States a “package plan” that contained many elements of ours [one, which was delivered in January].”¹⁷ Russia kept on promot-

such a decision does not correspond to the goal of denuclearization of the Korean peninsula that is also shared by the DPRK. Moscow called for discussion and settlement of existing problems at the negotiation table with the interests of all sides taken into consideration. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated during his Pyongyang visit in 2004: “We discussed [with Kim Jong Il] ways to make further progress at the Six Party Talks on the nuclear problem, sharing support for the principle of a package approach toward its all-encompassing solution. We also supported the DPRK’s suggestion that in the first stage the concept of ‘freeze for compensation’ should be taken as the basis.” Press Conference of the Minister, Pyongyang, July 5, 2004, at www.mid.ru.

15. “Russia has always stated that the DPRK as a sovereign state may develop its peaceful nuclear program in accordance with the norms of international law. If the DPRK would return to NPT and join the Additional Protocol on guarantees with the IAEA, it can expect cooperation and support from this organization and other states.” Russian Vice Foreign Minister Alexander Alexeev, *RIA* (Russian Information Agency) *Novosti*, August 17, 2005.

16. *Prime TASS* (Beijing), November 7, 2005.

17. *Vremya Novostei*, July 23, 2003.

ing its suggestions for a “package solution,” pointing out that its elements “coincide with suggestions of the other participants in the Six Party Talks.”¹⁸ The North Koreans expressed their appreciation of the Russian approach. In a rare interview in 2006, then North Korean foreign minister Paek Nam Sun publicly praised the Russian position “for the settlement of the nuclear problem of the Korean peninsula at the negotiation table in a peaceful way” and added, “we value the Russian efforts.”¹⁹ Of course Moscow and Pyongyang are divided on the problem of nuclear weapons in Korea, but recognizing the DPRK’s lawful concerns gives Russia leverage to positively influence Pyongyang’s position.

However, in the United States, Russian policy in Korea was and is viewed with suspicion even during the Clinton-Yeltsin period in the early 1990s when Russia was supposedly a “junior partner” of the United States in international affairs. With the advent of the Republican administration in Washington in 2001, the attitude changed for the worst. Although the diplomatic consultations continued throughout the George W. Bush presidency, it sometimes looked like their participants literally spoke different languages. The United States and its Western allies mocked President Vladimir Putin after he announced during his first G-8 summit in Japan in July 2000, having flown there from Pyongyang, that Kim Jong Il was ready to forego development of missiles provided he could get access to launching services. U.S. diplomats later seriously discussed such an option with the North Koreans.

U.S. officials in the first George W. Bush administration considered Russian policy toward the Korean issue “unhappy,” stemming from Russia’s “great power aspirations.” The Americans constantly wanted to change it. For example, in October 2003 Bush urged Putin to act sternly with North Korea, “as with a capricious child that throws food on the floor.”²⁰ Predictably, Moscow was against such policies in principle. So this demand was seen as an attempt to further isolate Pyongyang by spoiling its relations with Russia. The United States also suspected that

18. *RIA Novosti*, July 20, 2005.

19. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 28, 2006.

20. John Bolton, *Surrender Is Not an Option* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2007), pp.432-33, 312.

Moscow was keeping it in the dark concerning its dealings with Pyongyang.²¹

Russia is still often seen in the United States as merely supporting China on the main issues in Korean affairs, and not playing an independent role.²² At crucial moments in the UN (e.g., adopting the resolution on North Korea's missile launches in July 2006, and on its nuclear test in October 2006), while Russia's stance was seen as opposing the United States,²³ the U.S. side complained that the "Russian problem" was merely as a reflection of the "Chinese one."

More recently, Russia was reproached for "inactivity" in responding to the initiatives of Lee Myung-bak's administration and was said to be doing little to help North Korea overcome its isolation.²⁴ Washington was not happy with Russian statements that North Korea and the United States shared the fault for the stalling of the Six Party Talks in 2008.²⁵ In a fantastic scenario drawn up by some commentator, Russia is even considered capable of a Machiavellian design to arm North Korea with the purpose of selling more arms to South Korea and helping eventual production of nuclear weapons in South Korea after a U.S. withdrawal.²⁶ Some conservative U.S. experts consider that "Russia increasingly plays a self-serving spoiler role more related to a resurgent Russian resistance to the US globally than to anything relevant to Korea."²⁷

21. For example, Washington claims it was unaware of the contents of the above-mentioned "package resolution" presented by Russia to North Korea in January 2003 (which later become the basis for the "action for action" formula for solving the nuclear problem). See Charles Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2007), p. 59.

22. Bolton, *Surrender Is Not an Option*, pp. 294-301, 306-309.

23. *Ibid.*

24. U.S. Ambassador Alexander Vershbow's presentation at the Korea Economic Institute, January 31, 2008.

25. In February 2008, Deputy Minister Alexander Losukov blamed not only "lack of information about the DPRK's nuclear programs" for the halt in the 6PT, but also U.S. failure to meet its obligations to exclude the DPRK from the list of countries that sponsor terrorism." "Russian Diplomat Names Reasons for Halt In Six-Sided N. Korea Nuclear Talks," *Itar-Tass* (Tokyo), February 2, 2008.

26. *Asia Policy*, vol. 5 (January, 2008), p. 16.

27. Pacific Forum CSIS, *Pac Net*, No. 2 (January 9, 2008).

The spread of such opinions is regrettable since Russia's stance on nuclear nonproliferation on the Korean peninsula is in fact close to that of the United States. Russia supports U.S. efforts to find a diplomatic solution to the problem of Korean security. Russia does not maintain a unilaterally pro-Pyongyang position, as Western commentators sometimes argue.²⁸ Russian politicians and high-ranking diplomats are on record repeatedly saying that North Korean nuclear programs "threaten our interests," as when they strongly protested against the 2006 DPRK nuclear test.²⁹ On many occasions Russia has confirmed support for the Six Party Talks and vowed to continue cooperation for denuclearization.³⁰ A South Korean report has provided an appropriate assessment of Russian policy:

Russia has pursued fairly non-controversial policy objectives toward the Korean Peninsula: nuclear non-proliferation and the maintenance of peace and stability on the peninsula; support for inter-Korean dialogues and interactions contributing to a peaceful re-unification; expansion of mutually beneficial economic cooperation; and trying to obtain greater Korean involvement in developing Siberia and the Russian Far East. . . . Moscow has attempted to enhance its role as a serious "broker" with North Korea.³¹

Officially, Washington admits that U.S.-Russian cooperation

28. Following North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT on January 10, 2003 and its decision to suspend participation in the Six Party Talks on February 10, 2005, official Russian representatives repeatedly expressed concern, and stated that such actions did not correspond to the goal, supposedly shared by the DPRK, of denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Taking these facts into consideration, as well as the results of the Russia-U.S. and G-8 summits from 2002-2005 and Russia's decision to join the U.S.-led Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), President Putin had a firm basis to argue that Moscow's nonproliferation "positions are very close with the American partners." See www.mid.ru, January 2003 and February 2005; and "Bush, Putin Focus on Nonproliferation, Russian WTO Accession," <http://usinfo.state.gov>, September 16, 2005.

29. *International Herald Tribune*, January 31, 2007.

30. For example, www.vz.ru/news/2008/4/6/157537.html.

31. SK Group and the East Asia Foundation, "The Search for a Common Strategic Vision: Charting the Future of the US-ROK Security Partnership." A Report of the US-ROK Strategic Forum, February 2008, online at www.wm.edu/news/?id=8681.

on the North Korea nuclear problem is one of the important examples of foreign-policy coordination between the two countries.³² U.S. officials point out that the solution to the Korean problem is probably “the place we could work with Russia, as we have trouble working in other areas”³³ (especially after the Russian-Georgian conflict). Russian officials also see Russian-U.S. cooperation on Korean affairs as a possible model of foreign-policy coordination. Basing their opinion on 2007-2008 policy consultations, they are generally satisfied with the U.S. government’s approach. This approach, they argue, is based on recognition of the Russian ability to positively influence the denuclearization process and does not lead to infringement of Russian interests.³⁴

Toward a Korea Settlement

During the years that have elapsed since the start of the Six Party Talks, Russia has invested considerable effort in promoting the negotiations and preventing their collapse. Although the fate of the talks depends mainly on progress in U.S.-North Korea bilateral discussions (as the crises over frozen North Korean assets, the DPRK’s nuclear activities declaration, and the verification issue have shown), other countries’ positions can be either constructive or destructive. Russian positions are moderate: There are no unsolvable contradictions between the positions of the parties (including the United States and North Korea). Russia

32. A more positive view of the Russian role in the Six Party Talks was offered by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, who acknowledged in March 2008 Russian efforts to play an “honest broker” role. He noted Moscow’s significance in working out the outline of the future Northeast Asian security mechanism based on, among other things, Russian experience with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and in being instrumental in the practical aspects of future denuclearization. He later stressed a possible Russian role in getting rid of North Korean fissile materials. See his public address at Seattle University, April 17, 2008, at http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20080326/ap_on_go_ca_st_pe/us_nkorea.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Interviews with high-ranking Russian foreign ministry officials, February-March 2008.

strives for denuclearization under peaceful conditions and always tries to be constructive.

Moscow also keeps on promoting this line in its contacts with relevant countries. The Joint Statement issued by President Dmitri Medvedev and President Lee Myung-bak on September 29, 2008 in Moscow stated: "Russia consistently stands for provision of the non-nuclear status of the peninsula, for progress in the framework of ongoing six-party talks. We consider it necessary to continue this policy line, as well as the line for implementation in general of political, economic and humanitarian contacts between North and South in the spirit of agreements reached between these two states in the framework of summit meetings of 2000 and 2007."³⁵

However, contradictions with the West abound concerning a Korean settlement and the corresponding multilateral process. Moscow is particularly wary of Western participants' tactics to force new concessions from Pyongyang without adequate reciprocity, endangering the whole denuclearization process. Russian officials have consistently been critical of the Americans' "hard-line stance."³⁶ At the same time Moscow is unhappy with the U.S. view of the Russian role as that of only an "interested observer."³⁷ Russia wants to be an equal partner in finding a solution to the decades-old international problem bearing direct relevance to its interests. More trust and cooperation is obviously needed for that. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov noted in September 2008:

Differently from some other members of the Six-Party Talks, we are acting in a team spirit fashion, collectively, as was agreed initially. We try to avoid unilateral steps. The purpose is denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, not solving bilateral problems of some participants. It would be fruitful if all the members of the Six-Party Talks would fulfill their obligations by the letter of agreements reached and not file some other requests without consulting other partners. And of course it would be important that all the DPRK partners in the six-party process would actually participate in providing economic assistance to Pyongyang. That, I

35. See <http://kremlin.ru/sdocs/themes.shtml#207001>.

36. "Lack of 6-Party Progress Invites War, Russian Says," *Joonang Ilbo* (Seoul), March 1, 2004.

37. *KEI Academic Paper Series*, vol. 1 (2007), p. 197.

think, would constitute a package that would enable the forward movement.”³⁸

Russia’s ambition is to play a broker or moderator’s role, acting in synchronization with others. This was illustrated by its role in solving the crisis in the implementation of the February 13, 2007 agreements because of the freezing by the United States of the assets of the DPRK in Banco Delta Asia in Macao. Moscow consistently urged the United States, even publicly, to “make some steps toward the North Koreans” and find an amicable solution.³⁹ When the United States finally agreed to unfreeze the North Korean accounts and transfer the money to the North Koreans, Russia became indispensable because of the inability of all the countries concerned to implement this compromise decision. Banks simply refused to deal with the DPRK for fear of future negative consequences for them. The money was eventually transferred to North Koreans through a Russian commercial bank.⁴⁰

Despite disagreement within its leadership, Russia was the only member of the Six Party Talks besides the United States that actually supplied heavy fuel oil to North Korea as was agreed in February 2007. It continued carrying out this unattractive obligation even when the talks came to the brink of collapse in autumn 2008.

Moscow would be unhappy should the negotiation process break down. It has denounced North Korea’s attempts to question the viability of the talks. However, Russian officials indirectly blame the United States (and sometimes Japan) for dragging its feet on fulfilling its obligations and complicating the peace process.⁴¹ During Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan’s

38. See www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/AA10D0AC3DED12CDC32574C1002D4BB1.

39. *RIA Novosti*, January 17, 2007.

40. The United States has given the Russian bank involved with transferring the BDA funds a written guarantee that this would not cause trouble in the future even when the Bush administration ends. The absence of this guarantee for the Chinese or the American bank mentioned as mediators was the main reason this problem dragged on. Hwang Junho, “US, Gives Russian Bank A Written Guarantee,” *Pressian*, June 15, 2007.

41. For example, following the DPRK threat to suspend disablement of its

visit to Moscow in September 2008, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov noted: "We generally share the approaches and opinion that there should be measures to prevent breaks [in the six-party process]. We should leave behind the current phase and get back to implementation by all the countries of the agreements reached based on the principle of action for action."⁴²

However, Russian policy makers and the expert community alike fear that the six-party process might still get bogged because of insurmountable contradictions between the principle adversaries, the United States and the DPRK. In 2008, Russia was worried that the issue of North Korea's nuclear declaration and its nuclear cooperation with Syria might keep Washington from "delisting" the DPRK as a supporter of terrorism and removing trade sanctions, thus hampering progress in implementing the agreements. When finally North Koreans presented a more or less suitable declaration, U.S. conservatives prevented the actual delisting of the DPRK (symbolic though it is) by insisting on a verification process so strict as to be acceptable only to a country defeated in a war.⁴³ The North Koreans predictably responded with a "super-hardline policy." They kicked out IAEA inspectors and reversed the dismantlement of the Yongbyon reactor

nuclear facilities at Yongbyon and consider restoring them to the original state, the Russian foreign ministry made a statement on August 26, 2008 that this decision evoked disappointment and concern in Moscow and that "all the actions in the denuclearization field by DPRK should be accompanied by adequate political and economic steps [meaning assistance to Pyongyang] from the other five members of the talks. Russia fulfills its obligations timely and fully. We wish that all the other parties would act with the same consistency and good faith." *Kommersant*, August 27, 2008, at www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/2AAD65A3613FDDDD0C32574B200362492.

42. See www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/AA10D0AC3DED12CDC32574C1002D4BB1, and www.rosbalt.ru/2008/09/10/522237.html.

43. The *New York Times* pointed out: "According to David Albright, a nuclear proliferation expert, the administration is insisting that international inspectors have access to any sites, documents, individuals or material samples in North Korea they ask for, whether there's a plausible link to nuclear programs or not. Mr. Albright is as tough as anyone in insisting on transparency and verification. But he says the American proposal was 'a license to spy.'" Online at www.nytimes.com/2008/09/29/opinion/29mon1.html.

(as little practical value as it might have for them now) in an obvious attempt to influence U.S. policy circles and public opinion in the midst of the presidential campaign.

The Future of the Six Party Talks

An Action Agenda

In the future, should the talks continue under a new U.S. administration, the issue of a light water reactor could resurface. Pyongyang has made it clear that it sees an independent national electricity production capacity as essential; but it cannot be achieved without a nuclear-powered generation facility.⁴⁴ Russian experts have reminded the United States that North Korea expects it to create a proliferation-safe LWR instead of the reactor being demolished. Further down the road other issues—North Korea's missiles, other WMD, and the humanitarian situation in the DPRK—are likely to be put on the agenda, and the DPRK will demand comprehensive and irreversible guarantees for its system and elite as well as access to financial resources and development aid.

The real root of the controversy, as Russian experts interpret it, is the fact that no "strategic decision" has yet been taken in either capital about the future. The United States still has not demonstrated its long-term commitment to toleration of the Pyongyang regime and coexistence with it without overt or covert attempts to bring it down. Consequently, North Korea has nothing left but to depend on its "military deterrent" and try to keep the country isolated in order to conserve the system and prevent its collapse. Russian experts try to see the reality as it is and not set misleading goals and deadlines. A serious policy cannot be based on wishful thinking and misapprehension. It is hard to imagine how North Korea could discard its only trump card—the nuclear weapons it now has—in return for mere promises, although it is prepared to move forward cautiously with terminating and dismantling its military nuclear production program. That should be encouraged. At the same time it is necessary to be fully aware that

44. For more details see Georgy Bulychev, "Light Water Reactors at the Six Party Talks," at www.nautilus.org/fora/security/0578Discussion2.html.

North Korea's renouncing of nuclear weapons will take a much longer time, and even then may only happen if it is satisfied with comprehensive security guarantees that have yet to be provided.⁴⁵

How do Russian experts see the possible future of the Six Party Talks? There is still no agreed concept of what should be their outcome. This should be worked out collectively. The change of U.S. administrations provides a chance for setting a goal, which should be realistic and then would enjoy Russian support. Some possibilities follow.

- The chief strategic goal of the diplomatic process should definitely not be just denuclearization, but peace, development, and friendly cooperation in Northeast Asia. The issue of North Korea's security is sometimes omitted and that blocks any progress. Therefore it is necessary to solve the WMD and other related issues in a manner that would not jeopardize the main priorities—peacefully and step-by-step. In fact, solving the main task is the key to solving the WMD-related concerns.
- A peaceful scenario would presume turning the DPRK into a peaceful, non-aggressive, developing state, open to international cooperation—in short, the “conventionalization” of the country. That might seem utopian with the current regime, but it is under-

45. I share the opinion of some experts who suggest leaving the “denuclearization” rhetoric to the public relations domain while *de facto* treating North Korea as a nuclear power (which should have certain obligations under the NPT regime). In working out such a concept there are numerous challenges, as it has to be a compromise between different countries and political forces. See, in particular, the following analysis of the tasks for the new U.S. and ROK administrations: “For Washington, the challenge will be to find a way to conduct a public discourse about the suffering of the North Korean people without appearing to advocate regime change. For Seoul, the challenge will be to maintain a consistent stand to improve not only the economic welfare, but also the fundamental human rights of the people in the North without allowing Pyongyang to silence the truth with threats and bluster. . . . How can the United States and the ROK collaborate to meaningfully address the continued military dangers on the peninsula while imparting to the North the possibilities for an end to its isolation and a path to economic advancement? What steps are appropriate to reassure the North of the advantages of linking itself unambiguously to the region and the world, assuming that the DPRK leadership is prepared to do so?” *The Search for a Common Strategic Vision*.

going an evolution that could be successful provided the regime has sufficient guarantee of its security, including guarantees for the safety of the current elite. Therefore, the transformation should be gradual and not endanger political stability. An eventual power succession in the DPRK would present an ideal chance for starting such a process.

- International assistance is a must for overcoming the backwardness and isolation of the DPRK, which is necessary for comprehensive security. The long history of aid to developing countries suggests that aid can be futile, even counterproductive, in the absence of complementary reforms.⁴⁶ Therefore, economic assistance to the DPRK as part of the package for the solution of the nuclear problem should be aimed at assisting system transformation, not at preservation of its outdated model.
- The six-party format can be an ideal venue for coordination of such assistance. Its long-term aim should be the DPRK's economic and social transformation, by drawing it into the international division of labor and introducing international managerial experience, including a gradual transformation of the current political elite to become a more liberal government system. (Many members of the elite are relatives or comrades in a framework of clan politics.)
- For coordination of economic and development assistance, the interested countries (not limited to the Six Party Talk members) could choose to create a special body entrusted with the task of planning and providing such assistance. The experience of KEDO (the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization) proves that this task is feasible.
- In the longer run the solution to Korean security and development issues could provide momentum for forming a regional structure by institutionalizing the Six Party Talks.

The Desirability of a Multilateral Security System

Russia would like to see a multiparty security and cooperation system emerge in Northeast Asia. The Six Party Talks have provided a unique opportunity to try a multilateral approach to solving the thorny issues that plague the region. In a best-poss-

46. Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, "Economic Implications of Summit Agreement," *Policy Forum Online* 07-082A, Nautilus Institute, October 30, 2007.

ble future, we might paradoxically be thankful for the appearance of the North Korean nuclear problem simply because it actually triggered the emergence of regional security and cooperation dialogue. It took years to recognize the fact that a solution to the North Korean nuclear problem cannot be found without assuring the security of North Korea itself. The latter goal in turn cannot be achieved without the adoption of broader principles of interaction between the countries involved. That in turn leads to the conclusion that many “narrow” regional problems cannot be solved without first solving general issues of security and cooperation in Northeast Asia. This is especially critical in light of a nascent standoff between China, on the one hand, and the United States and Japan, on the other, a confrontation both sides would like to avoid in principle. Russia, having been drawn into a tense relationship with the United States globally in the wake of the war in Georgia, would also like to see Northeast Asia become a region of cooperation. There is no obvious geopolitical reason for confrontation there.

Russia has always been a proponent of a multilateral security mechanism in Asia and the Pacific.⁴⁷ Initiatives on multilateral Asian security organizations date back at least to the Gorbachev era.⁴⁸ Russian positions in Asia have considerably weakened since the demise of the USSR, while the centrifugal tendencies of the Far Eastern regions have been on the rise. Therefore, Moscow has become even more interested in promoting its interests through a multilateral structure, which would provide access to the decision-making processes of other governments and prevent unilateralism. Theoretically speaking, institutionalization

47. Commenting at a meeting in 2008 of the ASEAN Regional Forum, the Russian foreign ministry representative noted the need for “attention . . . to ways of strengthening regional cooperation in counteracting new challenges and threats.” In 2010 Russia plans to be a candidate for the post of co-chairman of the ARF Inter-Session Meeting on Counter Terrorism and Trans-National Crime. Russia would support proposals on launching a Work Plan on Counter Terrorism (U.S.), creating a mechanism for meetings of ARF experts on cyber security and the struggle against cyber terrorism (the Republic of Korea), and the ARF Inter-Session Meeting on Safety at Sea (Indonesia). Online at <http://itar-tass.com/eng/level2.html?NewsID=12894646&PageNum=0>.

48. See *Izvestia*, July 12, 1986.

of the Northeast Asian security and cooperation mechanism might play an important role in a changeover from contentions based on mutual deterrence to a system of cooperation and competition grounded in the balance of interests, i.e., in a “concert of powers.”

The Six Party Talks may play an important role in working out a “code of conduct” in Northeast Asia and setting up a multilateral mechanism to promote it. As chair of the Working Group on the peace and security mechanism in Northeast Asia (under the February 2007 agreements), Russia has suggested guiding principles for peace and security that the parties should find agreeable.⁴⁹ The official position is that these principles should be adopted at the level of foreign ministers and thus set the framework for future work. This opinion is shared by the United States, which hopes to move forward on developing a Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism that “would help transform the cooperative relationships built through the Six-Party Process into an enduring security framework for Northeast Asia.”⁵⁰ Russia also enjoys Chinese and ROK support in this activity.⁵¹

However, controversies among the Asian members of the club could prevent them from setting up a charter of Northeast Asian security and cooperation. At the same time North Korea sees the multilateral format mostly as a nuisance—merely decoration for its bilateral dealings with the United States. North Korean diplomats consider the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) model irrelevant to Northeast Asia, pointing to this organization’s failure to resolve the crisis in Yugoslavia.⁵² The

49. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 14, 2008.

50. See Christopher R. Hill, Assistant Secretary for Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Testimony before House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment and Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, Washington, D.C., October 25, 2007, online at <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2007/94204.htm>.

51. The Medvedev-Lee Myung-bak joint statement stressed that “The Korean side supported the constructive role of the Russian Federation in its capacity of Chairman of the Working Group on the mechanism of peace and security in Northeast Asia.” See <http://kremlin.ru/sdocs/themes.shtml#207001>.

52. The Third Russian-Korean Forum, Moscow, *Nauchnaya kniga*, 2002, p. 145.

stalemate in U.S.-North Korea dialogue as well as the pause in North-South Korea relations makes the DPRK's cooperation with the ROK on security issues unlikely and the degree of eagerness and initiative of the two Koreas in promoting multilateralism questionable at best. There is thus a niche for a relatively neutral Russian mediator role.

Active diplomacy in this direction is especially important for Russia in the context of its global relations with the "centers of power." As Russia is increasingly seen as an opponent if not a foe of the West (e.g., the expression "the new cold war" has already been coined), it would be natural to think its cooperation with the United States on global issues would be limited at best. However, this logic should not necessarily apply in the Korean case, which might well be considered a special one in Russia-U.S. international dealings. U.S.-Russia cooperation in the framework of the 6PT might have much wider global implications.⁵³

At the same time, Moscow conservatives still fear that a full-fledged OSCE-type structure might only increase the U.S. hold on the region without producing tangible benefits for Russia or for other regional actors. They argue that Washington only pursues its own interests and is trying to strengthen its foothold in the area. Under this logic a new security architecture might harness not only its allies but also China and Russia in a framework where the United States, not being a geographical part of the region, would have rights but not obligations.

The concept of what the agenda of the multilateral forum could be and the sequence of stages for establishing such a structure is being discussed in the Russian expert community. Some argue that Northeast Asia is not yet ready for a security mechanism and the road to it should start with a multilateral cooperation structure. "In a multilateral process," writes one Russian researcher, "structural and procedural issues are often

53. A positive view of the Russian role in the Six Party Talks was summarized by Assistant Secretary Christopher Hill, who acknowledged in March 2008 Russian efforts to play an "honest broker" role and Moscow's significance in working out the outline of the future Northeast Asian security mechanism based, among other things, on Russian experience with the OECD and future denuclearization. He later stressed a possible Russian role in getting rid of North Korean fissile materials. See his Seattle University address of April 17, 2008 cited earlier.

no less important for the effectiveness of the process than substantive issues.”⁵⁴ The multiparty diplomatic process should therefore become a multi-track one, where progress in one direction should not necessarily depend on the situation in other tracks. A Japanese expert’s approach—to link the bilateral, mini-lateral, and multilateral issues and institutions under the six-party umbrella framework—also seems sound.⁵⁵ Such an approach can be used to address region-specific proliferation issues, security guarantees, economic assistance, and diplomatic relations, including changing the Korean armistice regime to a new peace regime and achieving coordination of institutions.

Some suggestions for promoting the Northeast Asian cooperation organization building follow.

- The security architecture should be discussed at an early stage, although the implementation of an agreed concept might take time. The general principles discussed between the parties are well-established in international practice and include obeying the UN Charter principles, forging mutual trust, noninterference in internal affairs, a decline in military danger, and diplomatic conflict resolution. Nevertheless, these principles will still not be formally agreed upon pending resolution of the nuclear issue. Discussion (including at Track II level) aimed at working out common approaches to forming a collective comprehensive security system should therefore be encouraged. The Chinese idea of integrative security presented at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1996—combining comprehensive, cooperative, and common security concepts⁵⁶—could become a basis for these discussions.
- On a more practical level the sides should begin designing trust-building measures for the prevention of maritime and air inci-

54. Andrei Zagorski, “Relevance of Lessons Learned from CSCE for the Multilateral Cooperation in Northeast Asia,” paper presented at the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue forum (NEACD), Moscow, November 12, 2007.

55. Tsutomu Kikuchu, “An Institutional Design for Multilateral Security Cooperation in Northeast Asia: Retrospect and Prospects of a Multilateral Security in Northeast Asia,” paper presented at the Fourth Northeast Asia Security Policy Forum, Rinsa, Seoul, 2008, p. 133.

56. Su Hao, “A Concept of Integrative Security and Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation: Retrospect and Prospects of a Multilateral Security in Northeast Asia,” paper presented at the Fourth Northeast Asia Security Policy Forum, Rinsa, Seoul, 2008, p. 42.

dents, notifications of military exercises and their monitoring by observers, and annual reviews of defense doctrines. Ensuring the security of maritime communication lines in Northeast Asia and to the south may also be relevant.

- Countermeasures to nonconventional threats and challenges should be elaborated, including assistance during natural calamities, as well as fighting epidemics, environmental problems, cross-border crime, drug trafficking, and illegal migration. These issues are discussed at various fora, including ARF, but sometimes the area covered seems to be too broad for any concrete decisions and measures.⁵⁷
- Multilateral economic projects and coordination of regional economic policies should be discussed, particularly laying out common approaches to the setting up of new zones for free trade and reforming existing ones. Russia is especially interested in establishing regional integration in energy and transport infrastructure, in which it would be a core key participant.⁵⁸
- The setting up of an infrastructure for inter-civilizational and inter-ethnic contacts and rapprochement in the region where longstanding ethnic strife exists might become a historic mission of the new regional organization. It is important to develop joint projects in culture, science, and education, and stimulate multilateral humanitarian exchanges with due account of experience gained at bilateral negotiations.

Regardless of the twists and turns on the thorny road of Korean settlement, promoting multilateral security cooperation will remain Russia's priority. The reasons are not only military and security in nature but also economic. In this era of uncer-

57. For example, at the ARF Defense Officials Dialogue in Singapore on July 24, 2008, non-traditional security issues and cross-border security issues such as terrorism, trafficking in persons, smuggling, and global climate change and its impact on security, food and energy security were broadly discussed. Other issues briefly touched upon were the situation in North Korea, Iran, Afghanistan, and the territorial claims in the South China Sea. See www.mindef.gov.bn/MOD_Brunei/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=293&Itemid=70.

58. One of the examples of Russian eagerness to build the "Eurasian land bridge" is the October 4, 2008 official start of the reconstruction of the Hasan-Rajin railroad in North Korea. A spokesman for Far Eastern Railways called it "the first stage of the project that will make it possible to attract up to 100,000 containers annually to the Trans-Siberian railroad" for transportation to Europe. See <http://en.rian.ru/business/20081004/1>.

tainty of world finance, the development of the real estate sector is fast becoming a priority, and this means an increased need for Russia's greater involvement in Northeast Asian regional energy and industrial projects.

Principal References

- Berk, Michael. "Russia's Perspective on the DPRK and Regional Security," CIIA, February 23, 2007, *Cankor.Sa.*, No. 274, February 26, 2007.
- Bolton, John. *Surrender is Not an Option*. New York: Threshold Editions, 2007.
- Bulychev, Georgy. "Light Water Reactors at the Six Party Talks," www.nautilus.org/fora/security/0578Discussion2.html.
- Denisov, Valery. "The Problem of Nuclear Security on Korean Peninsula," www.nasledie.ru/oboz/N03_96/3_06.htm.
- Eberstadt, Nicholas and Richard Ellings, eds. *Korea's Future and the Great Powers*. Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 2001.
- Haggard, Stephan and Marcus Noland. "Economic Implications of Summit Agreement," *Policy Forum Online* 07-082A, San Francisco, Nautilus Institute, October 30, 2007.
- Hao, Su. "A Concept of Integrative Security and the Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation: Retrospect and Prospects of a Multilateral Security in Northeast Asia." Paper presented at the Fourth Northeast Asia Security Policy Forum, Rinsa, Seoul, 2008.
- Institute of International Economic and Political Studies. *Russia and Asian Countries: Policy and Cooperation in Mid-1990s* (Moscow), 1996.
- Kikuchu, Tsutomu. "An Institutional Design for Multilateral Security Cooperation in Northeast Asia: Retrospect and Prospects of a Multilateral Security in Northeast Asia." Paper presented at the Fourth Northeast Asia Security Policy Forum, Rinsa, Seoul, 2008.
- SK Group and the East Asia Foundation. *The Search for a Common Strategic Vision: Charting the Future of the US-ROK Security Partnership*. A Report of the US-ROK Strategic Forum, February 2008, www.wm.edu/news/?id=8681.

Toloraya, Georgiy D. "Crisis Prevention in Korea," in Vladimir I. Ivanov and Karla S. Smith, eds., *Japan and Russia in Northeast Asia*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1999.

Zagorski, Andrei. "Relevance of Lessons Learned from CSCE for the Multilateral Cooperation in Northeast Asia." Paper presented at NEACD, Moscow, November 12, 2007.