

A Perspective on Unification on the Korean Peninsula -- The View from Russia.

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October 30, 2021



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Dear colleagues and friends! First of all, I hasten to emphasize the huge role and contribution to the international movement in support of the unification of Korea and particularly the organization of the fifth Peace Forum on the Heavenly Unified Korea by the Mother of Peace, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon.

Of course, I would like to express my deep gratitude for this kind invitation to take part in this forum on October 30 and to wish great success to the forum. I regard the opportunity to speak at the remarkable event as a great honor for me.

One of the most important implications of the current forum is that it is confirmation that this "sacred" topic to both South Koreans and North Koreans, and is also at the center of international attention. Undoubtedly, the way toward Korean unification is a difficult and

winding one. Nevertheless, the realities of future unification remain unchanged. If one wishes to simplify the description, there are only two ways: peaceful unification and non-peaceful unification.

I will speak about the Russian approach. Russia strongly supports the peaceful approach. We believe the attempt to realize the non-peaceful approach may lead to a catastrophe for the whole Korean Peninsula. Since 2018, we appreciated and enjoyed the fact that the acute military crisis on the Korean Peninsula of 2017 was overcome, the military-political situation on the Korean Peninsula made a U-turn from war to peace, and the situation started speeding full steam ahead when it came to politics and diplomacy rather than military ways.

Starting from the Inter-Korean Summit, "summitry" for quite a long period has become a symbol characterizing the situation on the Korean Peninsula. During the triumphant visit to Pyongyang by the Republic of Korea president Jae-in Moon on September 18–20, 2018, the Pyongyang Joint Declaration of September 2018 was signed, including many significant agreements in various areas and even an extremely important one in the military field. What struck observers of the situation in Korea was the fact that the theme of inter-Korean solidarity sounded even louder than before.



North Korea's archenemy

Unfortunately, this peaceful process was interrupted after the Hanoi Summit in February 2019 at the DPRK–USA talks. However, now we see encouraging signs that both sides in North Korea and in South Korea are making efforts to restart this dialogue. In his address at the seventy-sixth session of the United Nations General Assembly on September 21, President Moon once again appealed to the world community. He urged the international community and first four major countries -- the United States, North Korea, and China alongside his South Korea -- to tackle Korean Peninsula issues by taking steps to declare to end of the Korean War.

It is remarkable too that this time this appeal was heard and provoked a positive reaction in Pyongyang. The DPRK leader's sister Yo-jong Kim called it "an interesting suggestion and a good idea." Recently, on October 11, Jong-un Kim himself stressed in a speech at a defense exhibition, "I want to reiterate that South Korea is not the target of our armed forces.... Our arch-enemy is war itself, not south Korea, the United States or any other specific state or forces." Such important peaceful statements from both South Korean and North Korean leaders is grounds for us to have hope for the resumption of inter-Korean talks leading to a possible meeting of the North Korean and South Korean leaders, which Russia very much supports.

I would like to emphasize why Korea is so important to Russia. The answer is quite simple. Russia and Korea are neighboring countries. We share the same border. Security and stability on the Korean Peninsula are an integral part of the security of the Russian border. Contrarily, instability on the Korean Peninsula and a possibility of a major military conflict are a direct threat to the Russian terrain and border.

From the very beginning of Russia–Korea relations, from the second half of the nineteenth century until now, the main interest and goal of Russian policy regarding the Korean Peninsula has been consistent. Russia supports prosperity on the Korean Peninsula and supports the existence of the Korean state as independent, united, and friendly to Russia.

Russia proved this late in nineteenth century and early in twentieth century. At the time, the Russian Empire strongly supported the independent status of the Kingdom of Korea or the Korean Empire in the last stage. Russia had very good relations with King Gojong in Korea who was the last Korean king. Russia supported him in his struggle for the preservation of independence of the Korean kingdom.



Russia came to Korea's aid

It was also right in the new period of bilateral relations which started in 1945 after the liberation of the Korean Peninsula with the support of the Soviet Army. It was only the Soviet Army that supported the Korean people in their liberation and the fight against the Japanese occupation as we know. In the very beginning, the Russian military administration controlled the situation in the northern part of the Korean Peninsula, while the American military administration did the same job in the southern part of the Korean Peninsula. At that time, Russia chose one Korean as its major and first counterpart to cooperate with in conducting the restoration of Korea among the multiple and diverse political forces in Korea.

It was an interesting period in Korea's political history. There were many political forces competing against one another. Russia did not choose a communist leader in Korea.

Instead, Russia chose Dr. Man-sik Cho, a famous political figure and a fighter for Korean independence, whose mentality was naturally fully in the framework of market economy development as the way forward for the Korean Peninsula–bourgeoisie democracy. Stalin had no intention to communize Korea. He strongly directed the Soviet representative in North Korea not to conduct a Sovietize Korea. He was in a full agreement that Korea develop a market economy but remain friendly toward the Soviet Union. I would like to reiterate it was Dr. Man-sik Cho who was the first person that the Soviet Russia wanted to cooperate with. He was the head of the first temporary government in the North Korea as the partner of the Russian Military Administration.

As for now, why is Russia supporting the reunification of Korea? The answer is simple. If Korea is

united, there is no insecurity on the Korean Peninsula; there is no instability or threat to Russia. It is well known that North and South have a long history of difficult relations. Sometimes, very acute. Sometimes very hostile.

Sometimes, on the eve of a new war. Anytime, they might spark a military crisis. This strong source of instability is very unfavorable for the Russian development of its Far Eastern Region. Therefore, if Korea is reunited, this source of instability will be removed forever. It will be very good for Russia.

Why is a military conflict and instability so dangerous for Russia? The answer is also very simple. A war on the Korean Peninsula will strongly affect the Russian border. Taking into consideration the fact that both conflict's potential belligerents (the U.S. and the DPRK) have nuclear weapons, unfortunately it is possible to expect nuclear warfare, which would be absolutely catastrophic not only for the Korean Peninsula, but for the neighboring countries and Russia, too.

We have big plans of integrating the Russian Far East into our Pacific Region. We have elaborated a number of logistical trilateral infrastructure projects. Such projects will allow shipping goods from Busan to Europe via the land bridge of the Korean Peninsula and Russia. Russia has invested considerable amounts of capital into numerous large-scale, long-term international infrastructure projects involving the Korean Peninsula, such as oil and gas pipelines, electricity lines, and Trans-Korean and Trans-Siberian railroads junctions. These projects are of crucial importance for the economic revitalization of the Russian Far East. In case of a new Korean War, these projects and Russian economic interests would be severely damaged. Such projects can be implemented only if there is peace on the Korean Peninsula, peaceful coexistence and cooperation. Russia supports exactly this kind of development.



Japan is unenthusiastic

Why does Russia have a special stance on Korean reunification? Of course, on the rhetoric level, all states which are deeply engaged in the Korean situation (USA, China, Russia, Japan) support the idea of the reunification. But we know that the historical background of this country is unusual. And Russia is the only country among these four, which never invaded Korea, never had territorial disputes with Korea, never had dark times with Korea like, say, Japan. Both the people in the North and South had bitter memories of the period of Japanese colonial rule. It is a fact remembered in Tokyo.

People in Tokyo know this and are not in a hurry to support the reunification on the Korean Peninsula. Some Japanese scholars argue that in the long history of Korea, sometimes, Korea was one, sometimes it was divided like in the period of three kingdoms. Therefore, they say, Korea was not always united, so why should we support the unification so strongly now? Now, there are two Koreas. Maybe, it is a normal situation and why change it, they would say.

The United States worries that a united and perhaps more economically independent Korea may raise the issue of a complete withdrawal of American troops from its territory since no logical basis would remain for stationing US troops there. China also has a long history of complicated relations with Korea. Sometimes peaceful, sometimes not. Therefore, there are many difficulties between China and Korea.

Historical

However, Russia has never invaded or attempted to occupy Korea. We have no difficult history with Korea. Our background is clean and friendly. We tried to support the independence of Korea since the

nineteenth century. The types of power in Russia changed dramatically, from the Russian Empire to the Soviet Union, and now, to a market economy and democracy. Powers changed, but the main and permanent goal for our relations with Korea has never changed. Our strategic interests were always for a peaceful, stable, prosperous independent state on the Korean Peninsula friendly to Russia. The main issue in Russia was always that the Korean Peninsula should not be ground used by hostile external forces. Therefore, Russia always supported the reunification of Korea, but only by peaceful means.

Thus, Russia has vigorously supported the significant, successful, efficient Sunshine Policy for the inter-Korean reconciliation, carried out by the presidents of the Republic of Korea Dae-jung Kim (1998–2003) and Moo-hyun Roh (2003–2008). It led to broad economic exchange and humanitarian exchanges. It increased mutual trust between North and South. We can see this policy was an important confirmation and testament to the practical, gradual rapprochement of the two Koreans based on the economic integration and cooperation being realistic and feasible. The experience of the joint venture in Kaesong supported this idea. It is possible and realistic. The expansion of this experience to the broader area of Korea in North and South can lead to gradual economic integration and future peaceful reunification. Russia supports this strongly.

Russia supports strongly the increasing of the independence role of inter-Korean factors. The Russian Foreign Ministry greeted the results of the first inter-Korean summit (in June 2000) as the strengthening of the role of independent inter-Korean factor and supported the results of the meeting between Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-il without any reservation. On the contrary, the USA expressed some concerns. The urgent visit of the USA's Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to Seoul was to convince the South Korean president not to be in a hurry to enter into rapprochement with North Korea, not to forget North Korea's hostile intentions.

Now we see the new encouraging attempt by President Moon to restart the Inter-Korean dialogue with the task of conducting one more summit. We are happy that it was met favorably by the leader of North Korea. We regard these moves as important steps toward the final goal of Korean reunification. Russia supports this movement.