

THE OPENING OF NORTH KOREA AND RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The end of 1980s and the beginning of 1990s witnessed in a quite number of countries comparatively fast and bloodless repudiation of socio-political and economic model, which is commonly named "socialism", or "communism" and the beginning of coming back/or transito to a liberal democracy model, whose examples are usually seen in industrialized countries.

At the same time, some countries, for example China, are trying to find their own, specific methods of adaptation to the realities of the present-day world and are proceeding with economic modernization while preserving domination of the traditional political elite and under its leadership.

Meanwhile, leaders of such countries as North Korea and Cuba not only delay ripen reforms, but trying to persue their traditional domestic policy even more vigorously. One can see, in particular in North Korea, unprecedented intensification of political, ideological and psychological indoctrination campaigns aimed at preserving the classical "socialist values" and waged along with various mass movements organized by authorities.

Pyongyang's unwillingness to undertake reforms at home coincides with reckless attempts by any means available to compensate the loss of two major allies and sources of political support and military and economic assistance-USSR and China. The most striking example of such kind of actions-North Korean's attempts to use nuclear problem as a bargaining card in order to establish diplomatic relations with USA and Japan and thus to get access to capitals and technology from the West.

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2. THINKING OF UNTHINKABLE

The solution of North Korean nuclear problem is now generally considered as absolute precondition to any sizeable progress in South-North dialogue and cooperation, including economic one. Some people inclined to continue to pressure North Korean regime and even refer N-issue to UN Security Council in order to impose sanctions on Pyongyang. There are even statements about possibility of military strike.

It seems to me that the road of pressure and sanctions may end with something like the second Korean war. The consequences of new military hostilities on Korean peninsula, taking into consideration improvement in armaments during the last 40 years, would be disastrous for the people in the both parts of Korea and for the country as a whole, and may be for the neighbour states.

Many strongly doubt that any responsible political leader will risk lives of millions of people in order to check if there is or not a disputable weaponry/and what if there is not any/. And even more strongly people doubt that all neighbour powers will let it happen for the sake their own security.

The nuclear issue as it is was to much extent the product of hasty and sometimes very arrogant diplomacy. The chronology of events looked like that. The absence of an agreement on procedure for mutual interkorean nuclear inspections has given ground for decision to resume in 1993 US-South Korean combine military drill "Team spirit". That in its turn, happened to be a good excuse for DPRK to announce its decision to withdraw from NPT.

Once more in Korea, may be more often than in any other place in the world, the lack of diplomatic successes is substituted by pressure or demonstration of force.

So are there any other policy options in order to resolve nuclear issue and to ensure positive development of relations between two parts of the country.

The history testifies that there are at least two more possibilities.

The first one is the solution within the framework of South-North dialogue.

Let me remind you that all tangible results in relations between two parts of the peninsula were achieved through bilateral talks. That include South-North Joint Statement in July 1972, delivery of goods for victims of floods in the South in 1984, exchange of relatives in 1985 and Basic Agreement in December 1991.

Though the conclusion of two historical documents in 1972 and 1991 was stimulated by drastic changes in the international and regional situations, nevertheless it is worth mentioning that negotiations were held and the documents were produced by efforts of two Korean sides.

Recently one German scholar, who came to this country to share Germany's unifications experience, said to me that if it had been up only to great powers, Germany would have been never reunited. But nobody dared to and couldn't stop

Germans in the both parts of country when they together realized the advent of Unification Day.

The second one lies mostly in the realms of world and regional diplomacy.

In 1975 Dr. Kissinger, at the time USA Secretary of State, proposed so-called cross-recognition of South and North Korea by four powers. According to the formula, USA and Japan should establish diplomatic relations with DPRK, in return the USSR and China were supposed to act alike in respect to Republic of Korea.

In July 1988 Mr. Roh Tae Woo, the former president of ROK promised that this country would help North Korea to establish relations with ROK's allies.

What has happened for the last 5 years? South Korea has managed to preserve the existing alliances and to get new friends. North Korea-your partner and rival simultaneously-has actually lost its two major allies and got nothing instead. More than that, the very same regime which during almost half a century claimed that it was the only legitimate one on the peninsula and was very near to prove it during Korean war, nowadays is faced with stark reality to repeat the destiny of East Germany or Romania.

What do you expect from anybody who is cornered with no exit? To reinstate the balance Pyongyang desperately needed relations with Washington and Tokyo, but due to its domestic problems and international position had no cards to make USA and Japan at least to talk, not saying about something more. No cards except one-a nuclear problem.

Maybe it sounds paradoxically, but Pyongyang actually was forced to use the nuclear card in its struggle for survival. Among too exaggerated expectations triggered by the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe nobody, seems to me, seriously calculated and nobody actually wanted to leave any exit or sanctuary for the rival-partner. By the way, it is totally against basic principles of liberal democracy, adherence to whose so ardently proclaimed by those who did the job.

This has been said not to justify Pyongyang behavior for there could be no justification for nuclear games but for the sake of looking into the roots of the problem for our own mistakes.

Russia doesn't consider Pyongyang's position on problems related to mass destruction weapon as entirely internal affair of DPRK and consistently reminds Pyongyang about necessity to abide with obligations taken by DPRK, for example, as a UN member-state. Once more it was clearly demonstrated during President Boris Yeltsin's visit to Japan in October 1993.

Some people claim that after the nuclear issue is settled, the South and the North will see rapid development of their relations. Unfortunately the history of South-North unification problem saw a lot of declarations and even obligations to ensure a major progress in case some conditions would be met by the opposite side. But each time when old stumbling blocks were removed, new, more grave problems emerged and hindered further progress with no less effectiveness than the old ones.

It seems to me that both South and North have miscalculated on the problem. The nuclear deadlock has demonstrated that leaders both in the South and in the North at the moment on some reasons, mostly domestic, are not so much ready for a speedy development of the dialogue. Both sides were and still are looking for a respite.

In sum we have all facts to come to the conclusion that the rigid linkage between nuclear issue and other problems, especially economic one, puts us all in a passive position. That suits only Pyongyang providing it with unique opportunity to go on with its hermit kingdom policy and to get new concessions from world community.

So if we have decided not to strike North Korea and get several years which are necessary to avoid or at least reduce unification shock we should look for other, untill now almost unexplored options.

3. ECONOMY AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPENING

Recent developments clearly signaled what concrete direction within this broader framework may lead not only to solution of the nuclear issue but also/which is much more important/to eventual opening of North Korea.

The following facts are worth of our attention. Last week North Korea suspended talks in Panmunjom on an exchange of special envoys between the South and the North. At the same time Pyongyang sent his delegation to Seoul over weekend to discuss the Tumen river project, whose realization, as hoped in Pyongyang, would help to attract foreign capital in sagging North Korean economy. Also last week the North for the first time adopted a law that would allow foreign corporations and individuals to lease and use its land.

The pattern is more than evident. North Korea is vitally interested in promoting economic ties with outer world. This is actually the only sphere where it is ready to open at least to let a guest to enter through the door. Why should we reject the invitation?

The worst mistake of the opponents of such approach is an assumption that economic cooperation will make the present regime in the North stronger. It is just not true. Economic cooperation will help to save North Korean economy, to upgrade its technological level, to make North Koreans more civilized people, namely more prepared to survive in a modern society. In other words, it will help to lessen the existing gap between two parts of the country and future unification's cost.

As it comes to the North Korean regime, experience of many countries, including this one, proved that certain level of economic maturity and corresponding level of civilization made such regime obsolete. You know that better than me.

Let me remind you that economic cooperation means not only amount of loans,

trade volume indicators and numbers of economic projects realized in the given country.

For example, the former USSR was the largest trade and economic partner of the DPRK. Its share sometimes reached from 30 to 60% of DPRK foreign trade volume.

The USSR assisted in building or modernizing more than 70 major units in industry, transportation, communication and other spheres of economy. By 1991 they produce 64% of the electric power, 60% of the petroleum products, 40% of the iron ore, 35-40% of the rolled steel, 100% of the aluminium, 100% of the enameled wire, 90% of the car batteries and microelectric motors, 33% of the ball bearings, 20% of the fabrics made in North Korea.

By the 1990 over 100 North Korean clothing factories were fulfilling Soviet orders under supervision of Soviet technical personnel.

Now lets count thousands and thousands Soviet and other foreign, on one side, and North Korean-on the other-governmental and non-governmental agencies and their officials, technicians, scholars, teachers and last but not the least rank-and-file people were involved in arguing, wording, day-to-day implementation of agreements on economic and technical cooperation.

In 1980s there were years when at the given period of time up to 100-200 soviet technicians were working side by side with North Korean engineers and workers at several large industrial plants and construction sites in the different parts of the country, also teaching them at their workplaces and helping to become qualified specialists.

The intensive economic exchanges provided possibilities for broader contacts in the spheres of culture, science, sport, tourism, etc, opened doors much wider for North Koreans to visit mostly, of course, the USSR and East European countries.

Thus economic exchanges proved to be the main channel through which the North Koreans received news from abroad including those about perestroika, glasnost, democratization in the USSR and other socialist countries. That channel provided the only possible, under existing domestic conditions, stage for many thousands of ordinary people in North Korea to directly contact foreigners on everyday basis.

Sure that one can find there not the best partners in the world to negotiate and to implement agreements. Nevertheless nowadays much more often than ever before one can meet at a trade talks table in the North not only old party nomenclatura, but young technocrats who under the barges with image of Kim Il Sung are hiding ever growing desire to live up to the standards of their southern compatriots. They are mostly managers of newly-born trading companies which look suprisingly similar to South Korean chaebols.

And they are eager not only to manage, but also to own these companies. Those who let them know that after unification they wouldn't be thrown away and granted security for themselves and their families would find in them responsive partners.

Nowdays they are trying to negotiate their future. It is the most correct, in my opinion, interpretation of "10-points Program for Great Consolidation of the Whole Nation" devised, as North Korean official news agency CTAK stressed, personally by North Korean leader Kim Il Sung and immediatly adopted by the 5-th session of Supreme People's Assembly of DPRK in April 1993.

I mean proposals which call for "recognizing" and "protecting" in reunified Korea material and cultural wealth of organizations and individuals.

Sceptics can say that these provisions could be equally applied to South Korean ruling elite in order to woo it into Pyongyang-style unification. But when the North felt itself stronger than the South and hoped to unify the country on its conditions, it had never made such generous gestures towards Seoul. If it was supposed that unification would be achieved on Pyongyang's terms, there wouldn't be any need for North Koreans to be concerned about their material and cultural wealth.

The new proposals have clearly signalled, that a younger and more active part of North Korean ruling elite' has a strong desire to secure a safe place in united Korea.

4. KOREAN PROBLEM AND RUSSIA'S POLICY

The main principles and directions of new foreign policy of Russia at the global and regional levels are presented in the "Bases of the Foreign Policy's Concept of the Russian Federation", approved by president Boris Yeltcin in April 1993.

In order to clear away any doubts about Korean policy of Russia it is definetly stated that "reunification of both Korean states meets Russia's interests". First, it would eliminate the hotbed of instability near our border. Secondly, the appearance of such new geo-political unit as united Korea with 70-million population would bring new dimensions into international relations in the region and thus would open new possibilities for Russian diplomacy.

At the same time Russia consider it is very important to ensure evolutional character of unification's process in Korea. The natural development in the sphere shouldn't be pushed forward because it could bring an uncontrolled explosion.

That's why when it comes to South-North dialogue, Russia prefers to pursue the course announced by Mr. Yeltcin during his visit to Seoul and which says that the keys to Korea's unification are rested in the hands of two Korean states. The task for Russia is to help to create the situation in this region which will be conducive to peace process.

At the same time Russia's relations with both ROK and DPRK proved that extent of Moscow's positive influence on events on Korean peninsula and, what is more, in North-East Asia, ponderability of its positions in the region in relations

with USA, China, Japan and South Korea itself directly depend on Russia's ability to keep necessary balance in its relations with ROK and DPRK.

It was a little bit different in case of South and North Korea.

After dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991 Russia has rejected its former policy of ideologization of international relations. This approach should be, in principle, applied to relations with any state.

If nowadays it is considered as a mistake former Soviet Union's ignorance, on ideological grounds, of the existence of Republic of Korea, it would be not less wrong for Russia not to maintain, because of the same considerations, normal relations with a neighbouring country-DPRK. Otherwise Russia, once have declared the end of its inclination to divide all countries in two classes: friendly and alien, in real policy again could embark on the same road, only changing signs attached to some countries from "good" to "bad" ones.

Unfortunately, that was exactly the case in relations between Russia and two Korean states. Soviet Union and Russia's Korean policy was and remains overloaded with ideological dogmas. Untill the end of 1980s we "hadn't noticed" the existence of the sovereign state on the southern part of the Korean peninsula. Nowadays we don't care much about our relations with DPRK-a country, which has not only the common border with Russia, but also the treaty with important political and military clauses.

Generally speaking, basic principles of international relations and UN Chapter require that all states should strive to maintain normal, cooperative-mood relations with all members of international community.

Any attempts to curtail, to say nothing of desruption of, relations with any country would be contrary to the prevailing trends in the present international environment, where the most sworn enemies, like Israel and PLO have managed to find both courage and common ground to improve their relations.

Only maintaining the certain level of relations with Pyongyang Moscow can make a sound contribution to resolving the nuclear problem on the Korean peninsula.

Experience of settlement of regional conflicts proved involved, had chances to "remain in the game".

Russia is interested in ensuring its political and economical access to DPRK also because while rapidly expanding economic ties with ROK, Moscow continue to preserve wide economic interests in DPRK.

It has been already mentioned how important economic ties could be for DPRK's opening. To continue efforts in the direction for Russia it will be necessary to maintain the relations at least at the present level.

There we have large investments, familiar market and economic partners, who are also remain interested in maintaining and promoting economic and trade ties with the northern neighbour, particularly because of technological and geographical considerations.

Such interdependence are likely to remain even after reunification of Korea.

The case of Germany demonstrates vividly enough that East German industry was developed to considerable extent to meet import demands of the USSR and even nowadays remains interested very much in working for Russian market.

Only in case of maintaining and improvement of bilateral relations with DPRK Russia can hope that Pyongyang's debt of 3.3 billion rubles/in 1990 year prices/to former USSR will be paid, at least for the most part.

It is actually impossible for Russia to participate in realization of multilateral cooperation projects, while curtailing economic ties with DPRK.

At this point it is possible to come to the conclusion, that, to all appearances, both Moscow and Pyongyang managed to demonstrate the necessary degree of prudence in order not to make a gap in mutual relations even more wider.

North Korea had enough time and opportunities to become sure that, in spite of visible correction, Russia's foreign policy, though has become less comfortable, remained far from being hostile.

In its turn, in Russia is deepening understanding of the fact that efficiency of Korean policy of Russia will be greatly influenced by Moscow' ability to keep normal relations both with Seoul and Pyongyang. Russia, would it be unable to have such relations with DPRK, which remains an important player in a security structure in North-East Asia, would be of no interest as a helpful and needy partner for international community in the region.

Nowdays any request to Russia to cooperate in efforts aimed at resolving North Korea's nuclear problem and at its opening is tantamount to asking Moscow to promote its relations with Pyongyang.

By the way, that's exactly the case with USA-North Korean relations. Washington started to hold talks, sign joing documents and to send its congressmen to Pyongyang. To achieve any kind of agreement one can establish and maintain at least minimum-level relations.

At the same time Russia is trying to promote full-fledged ties with Republic of Korea and believes that relations between two countries have very good perspectives, especially in trade and economy.

Russia does not claim the superpower role, no does it seek to be present and spread its influence everywhere; it does not impose its ideological doctrine on anybody, neither does it threaten with military force other states.

Russian military doctrine, approved last week, has "a clearly expressed defensive character". "No state or coalition is seen by Russia as a potential enemy". All the states whose policy does not damage Russia's interests are seen as its partners.

At the same time it is oriented toward a firm and active protection of Russia's vital interests and security. The new doctrine allows use of nuclear weapons "against states, nuclear or nonnuclear, which have undertaken aggression against Russia or supported such aggression".

"Russia reserves the right to use all means at its disposal to repulse aggression and crush the aggressors", said Valery Manilov, deputy secretary of Russian

Security Council.

This is in line in position of United States, Great Britain and France, which have maintained such a policy for years, arguing that to pledge otherwise would diminish the deterrent value of their nuclear arsenals.

At the same time the new Russian military doctrine hopes to eliminate nuclear weapons someday.

Russia's foreign policy priorities are to provide stability and security at the global and regional levels and to develop normal relations and mutually beneficial trade and economic ties with all countries of the world and especially with Russia's neighbours, including Northeast Asia.