At present, Russian-North Korean relations are experiencing a sort of renaissance, which stands out in contrast against the background of the recent cold snap. After all, even during the celebration in the DPRK of the 60 year anniversary of the end of the "hot phase" of the Korean War in July, 2013, Moscow decided to demonstrate its negative attitude toward North Korea's third nuclear test in February, 2013, as well as its "adventurous" behavior during the acute military and political crisis on the Korean Peninsula in March and April of the same year, and maintained only a modest Russian presence at this event. China, despite its own irritation for the same reasons, also sent the third highest ranking member in the PRC's hierarchy to Pyongyang during the aforementioned celebration, who was at the side of the DPRK's young leader, Kim Jong Un, throughout.

In this context, the North Koreans took unprecedented steps to demonstrate their intention to strengthen bilateral relations with Russia within the framework of the holiday events. The program of large scale athletic and artistic representations of "Arirang" began with a scene symbolizing friendship between our peoples, accompanied by a slogan on the "live" platform: "Korean-Russian friendship - From generation to generation". Even more significant was the episode during the military parade, when (for the first time in history!) the North Koreans acknowledged the participation of Soviet troops in the Korean War with gratitude. A large banner with the image of a Korean soldier, a Chinese volunteer, and a pilot with a Slavic appearance in a helmet in profile was driven along the stands on a truck. The caption under the banner read: "Thanks to all who fought together with us".

At a reception hosted on the same day, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK, Pak Ui-Chun, said directly to his Russian guest: "Did you see the symbol at the parade?... tell S.V. Lavrov, that we 'aren't hiding anything".

It appears that this message was heard in Moscow. Since 2014, there has been a flurry of bilateral contacts at a high level. In January, the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK (second in command of the state), Kim Yong-Nam, traveled to Russia to participate in the opening of the Olympic Games in Sochi and had conversations with Russian President V.V. Putin and Russia's other leaders. In March, Pyongyang was visited by president of Tatarstan, R.N Minnihanov, and Minister of Development for the Far East of the Russian Federation, A.S. Galushka. All these visits were very fruitful, and held in an unprecedentedly open and friendly atmosphere. At the end of April, a visit to Pyongyang is expected from the Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, the Plenipotentiary Representative of the Russian Federation, and the President in the Far Eastern Federal District of the Russian Federation, Yu. P. Trutneva.

Russia has specific plans to actively expand its economic presence in North Korea. And this is one of the reasons for Moscow's genuine interest in reducing tensions on the peninsula, which it attempts to affect not only through words, but through deeds.

One of the vectors of intermediation efforts by Russia is the promotion of three major trilateral (RF-DPRK-RoK) infrastructure projects: unite the railroads in both Koreas with the Transiberian, construct gas pipelines and power lines from from Primorye to South Korea through North Korea, in which Russia has already invested significant funds. Moscow is not inclined to underestimate the serious interest of Pyongyang in broadening Russia's economic presence, including as a means for reducing its one-sided over-reliance on China. In this regard, Moscow also
realizes that this "window of opportunity for Russian business will not be open forever, and may quickly "slam" in the event of a change in the foreign policy situation and the large scale arrival of major economic players such as the USA, Japan, RoK, and EU in North Korea. After all, there is considerable evidence that even now during a time of harsh economic sanctions imposed by the governments of the above-mentioned countries against Pyongyang, the representatives of their business communities are aggressively seeking and finding diverse opportunities to implement their business projects in North Korea.

For this reason, we are pleased to note that one of the successful efforts of the Russian Federation in this area took place in February, 2014 when a group of businessmen from South Korea visited, representatives from major companies: Hyundai, the steel giant Posco, and the railroad company Korail at the North Korean port of Rajin, where it successfully operates the Russian - North Korean joint venture RasonKonTrans has completed the construction of a modern railway from the Russia - DPRK border to this port and the reconstruction of one of its piers. It is noteworthy that this visit by Southerners to the North was conducted while the law adopted by the previous South Korean administration of President Lee Myung-bak that forbids any trade or economic collaboration with the North was in effect. Regarding this unprecedented trip by Southerners to the North, the Ministry of Unification of the RoK issued a special comment that this contact did not represent a repeal of Lee Myung-bak's law, but simply an exception to it. Nevertheless, the meeting in Rajin was fruitful, and this line of inter-Korean cooperation has gained serious prospects for development.

In this connection, we must not forget the important and constructive role played by Russia in promoting a dialog between North and South Korea. This was demonstrated during the visit by Russian President V.V. Putin to the RoK in November, 2013, when a memorandum of intent was signed by the above-mentioned champions of South Korean businesses wishing to join the activities of the Russian-North Korean joint enterprise in Rajin aimed at transforming this point into a powerful intermodal transshipment hub, a "Rotterdam in Eastern Asia". This step, as we see, has continued and has good prospects for further development.

There is another area where Russia has been called to play an important role - the course for the revival of six-party negotiations on the nuclear issue in the Korean peninsula and the search for realistic solutions to existing challenges in this area. For the most pressing of these, read on.

As is well known, at this stage the DPRK decided to concentrate on the development of nuclear energy based on uranium enrichment and the use of light-water reactors. The construction of an experimental LWR is close to complete. In the opinion of domestic and western nuclear physicists, the qualifications of Korean specialists should allow them to complete these projects. Nevertheless, there is the problem of the technical precision and nuclear safety of these facilities.

The Northerners build them solely on the basis of their own intellectual and scientific-technical base, fully isolated from the outside world, without any professional consultation or observation from abroad, i.e., essentially "reinventing the wheel". As a result, the compliance of the constructed nuclear facilities with international standards of safety, the requirements of which have been substantially increased after the tragedy in Fukushima, cannot help but be held in serious doubt.

The prospect of new nuclear power facilities appearing in close proximity to their own borders, facilities at which the parameters and standards of nuclear safety are completely unknown and the degree of safety is highly questionable, inevitably invokes understandable and serious concern, especially in the states neighboring the DPRK, including Russia.

This challenge presents Moscow with the necessity of generating ideas and initiating appropriate action for the purpose of reformatting and "repackaging" the current system of international sanctions on the DPRK's nuclear weapons program with the aim of achieving a resolution on cooperation of competent international organizations in the field of peaceful nuclear energy with this country. Similar precedents have been set in global practice. Pakistan, despite not being a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), successfully collaborated with the IAEA in the areas mentioned.

Russia is keenly interested in ensuring that the construction of a LWR in North Korea is done under international monitoring and in compliance with international norms of nuclear safety. As is well known, Rosatom is a recognized global leader in this area, and could play a fundamental role.

It seems that despite all the legal and ideological complexity of solving this problem in the UK Security Council,
common sense and similar concerns for their own safety may help Russia to find a common ground with the other neighbors of the DPRK: China, Japan, and the RoK.

American scholars have also indicated that this problem is pertinent. One such scholar, the director of the Nautilus Institute, Peter Hayes, confirmed that the non-military nuclear potential of Pyongyang, namely this power facility, presents a real threat to regional security and demands the constructive attention of the international community.

Russia’s core interests, including the tasks of strengthening national security, especially in the Far East, require that Moscow continue its independent and active policy regarding the Korea issue, which raises the question about the integrity of the search for new unconventional solutions that facilitate a change of mindset by the international community, primarily the prevailing alarmist stance taken by Washington, and its current passive policy on Korea from the point of view of diplomacy.

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