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POLITICAL PROBLEMS OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, GLOBAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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PROSPECTS OF KOREAN SETTLEMENT

The complex set of problems around the situation in the Korean Peninsula is not accidentally called a kind of “Gordian knot” of world politics of our days. Unfortunately, attempts to cut this knot with one blow of a sword as it did Alexander the Great in the IV century BC, are fraught in the XXI century with the disasters of regional and global character. The author of the article below uses his experience in conflict-prone areas to present a possible scenario of political and diplomatic denouement of the Korean Gordian knot.

Key words: DPRK, Republic of Korea, USA, China, Russia, UN, the prospects for resolving the problem of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, denuclearization, inter-Korean negotiations, Korean reunification, the Peace Treaty, the world order, hegemony, multi-polarity.

Any attempt to resolve a complex Korean equation with many unknowns must come from objective realities. This explains, in particular, the success of the Russian-Chinese road map proposed in 2017¹. Although at the time of its presentation there were skeptical voices, nevertheless, the actual achievements in solving Korean problems in 2018 were achieved precisely along the path of the above realistic scenario. Therefore, any approach to the “Gordian knot” of the Korean Peninsula should begin with an inventory of the interests of the parties-participants, without which the settlement is simply impossible. Among them are:

- the will of the international community to respect the nuclear non-proliferation regime and the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula;
- North and South Koreans’ desire for reunification;

¹ Joint statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China on the Korean Peninsula. 14 July 2017. Information portal of the MFA of Russia. – URL: http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2807662 (Date of the application: 05.11.2018).

- the political will of South Koreans to live in accordance with Western notions of democracy and human rights;
- North Koreans' support for the current social and economic system in their country;
- the imperative of U.S. policy prohibiting the possession by DPRK's nuclear missile complex;
- inadmissibility of such a decision for Beijing and Moscow, under
- which US troops would go to the border of Korea with China and Russia.

At the same time, it should be borne in mind that the above interests should not be met in any order of priority, but, as far as possible, simultaneously. This simultaneousness should be ensured by constant rounds of multilateral and bilateral negotiations, primarily in the format of the "six" nations (North Korea, Republic of Korea, China, Russia, USA, Japan), as well as on a wider platform.

The best starting point for the process would be a joint Declaration of commitment by the parties to respect the above principles of six nations.

The first practical step towards a settlement should be the signing of a peace Treaty, drawing a line under the war of 1950-1953.

There is currently quite a lot of discussion about who should sign the treaty. After all, the famous armistice agreement 1953 was concluded between four parties, including in addition to the Korean representatives¹ an American General and a Chinese commander of the people's volunteers.

This debate seems to be of a scholastic nature and is initiated by those who do not wish to allow any Peace Treaty to be signed. In fact, the war in Korea began as a civil war between nationalists and Communists, and representatives of those parties, i.e. the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, must sign the Peace Treaty. By signing the Treaty, the parties would give up their ambitions to extend their political systems and ideological paradigms of thinking to the entire Peninsula and thereby satisfy the two most important priorities of the General scheme of solving the Gordian knot problems.

Of course, a peace treaty will be effective if and only if its implementation is most serious way (in the terminology of the Russian Foreign Ministry – "reinforced concrete guaranteed"²). It appears that any such set of "reinforced concrete" guarantees should include the following imperatives:

¹ The Republic of Korea does comply with the terms of the armistice, although formally there is no the signature of its representative under the text, at the same time, the DPRK that officially signed the document of the armistice, repeatedly stated its the withdrawal from the agreement.

² Speech and answers to media questions by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov following talks with Foreign Minister of the DPRK Lee Yong-Ho. Moscow, 10 April 2018. Information portal of the Russian Foreign Ministry. Document 674-10-04-2018. – URL: http://www.mid.ru/main_fr/-/asset_publisher/G51iJnfMMNKX/content/id/3162263 (Date of the application: 05.11.2018).

- mutual withdrawal of troops from the demarcation line to a possibly greater (not less than 100 km) distance. Only limited contingents of police officers armed with personal weapons can be deployed directly on the demarcation line;

- downsizing of the armed forces of both Korean states to a reasonable minimum;

- giving the demarcation line the status of a state border. Opening of a certain number of checkpoints on the state border, sufficient for economic cooperation and humanitarian contacts between the two Korean states as well as international transit;

- formation of inter-Korean cooperation bodies on the confederate basis; a deployment in the demarcation zone of the UN peacekeeping forces. Units of such forces (land, sea and air) should have effective powers (UN mandate) and material resources to prevent a conflict between the two Korean states; stage-by-stage elimination of North Korean nuclear missile potential, synchronized with the termination of the US military presence on the Korean Peninsula and the adjacent Pacific ocean. The first stage is placing the DPRK's nuclear missile forces under IAEA control. The second is their withdrawal and storage in one zone under international control on the territory of the DPRK. The third stage is the removal of all components of the nuclear missile potential outside the DPRK. The fourth stage is the destruction of all components of the nuclear missile potential, as well as capacities and research centers for their production and upgrading. At the same time, it is meant that the US military presence on the Peninsula and in the relevant water area should be terminated, at least, by the end of the second stage of the denuclearization schedule;

- establishment of the International Inter-Korean Settlement Fund under the auspices of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

As of today, the most controversial and problematic point of this program is the elimination of the US military presence on the Peninsula. The United States itself will strongly be against it, at least under the D. Trump Administration, part of the South Korean elite and, of course, Tokyo. Meanwhile, there are no legal impediments to such act, as there is no risk for the White House to "lose face." After all, though many people do not remember this now, the official status of American troops in Korea is "UN troops". Therefore, a comprehensive plan of inter-Korean settlement can and should organically include nothing else, but an ordinary "rotation" of the peacekeeping contingent.

The renewed peacekeeping contingent, in agreement with the signatories to the peace Treaty, should include troops from neutral and non-aligned States. The ideal candidate for this function seems to be India, as a state on the one hand neutral, authoritative, and on the other having enough powerful armed forces to ensure the implementation of peacekeeping powers.

In favor of India as a participant in the inter-Korean settlement also speaks the fact of the cultural and historic ties between the two peoples. Chronicles say that in 49 BC Indian Princess Alodia married Korean King Kim Suro. Another

cultural feature that unites the countries is Buddhism, which came to Korea from India in the fourth century. In the twentieth century, Delhi was not indifferent to the vicissitudes in the Peninsula: 350 Indian doctors during the civil war provided assistance to both military and civilian population. In the difficult years of the 90s, when North Korea was left without the assistance of its such traditional donor as the USSR, India provided significant food aid to the starving Koreans. In the XXI century (before the adoption of the UN Security Council sanctions), a significant trade turnover of one billion US dollars has developed between the two countries. There is also a very significant experience of Delhi's participation in the UN activities on the Peninsula. In 1947, India was Chairman of the nine-party UN Commission which oversaw the process of the division of Korea. After the Korean war, India once again played an important role as Chairman of the Independent Commission for the repatriation of peoples on the Korean Peninsula.

Of course, the Indian component of the peacekeeping force could be supplemented by contingents from ASEAN countries, as well as possibly from other geographical areas. To a large extent, this is a matter of financial resources and considerable resources. Therefore, the plan provides for the establishment of a special Fund for Inter-Korean Settlement. It appears that the selection of potential donors to the Fund should be reconciled with the practical realization of the denuclearization timelines.

In general, the issue of synchronizing the process of inter-Korean settlement and denuclearization of the Peninsula is the central and most difficult one in that Gordian knot. First, because there is more than interpretation of this concept. For Washington, denuclearization is primarily and mainly is the elimination of the North Korean nuclear weapons and launch vehicles. But other participants in the process believe that this should include the withdrawal of the American military contingent of almost thirty thousand troops from the territory of South Korea and the US guarantees to abandon any placement of nuclear charges near the Korean coast plus the refusal to use nuclear weapons against the DPRK. Second, because Pyongyang deftly linked concessions on its missile and nuclear complex, including elimination of the resonance range in Bhongiri, with the theme of Korean reunification.

Whatever was said by the official representatives of the United States, the theme of Korean reunification, so close to the hearts of all Koreans, is, at least, of no interest to the American political elite, and in fact people in Washington are so fond of Korea that they prefer to have just two. This follows logically from the ancient "divide and rule" principle. Thus, in February 2018, Pyongyang managed to launch two tracks of the Korean settlement – the track of denuclearization and the track of reunification. But the North Koreans, by no means, intend to give the question of synchronizing these processes to Washington. Pyongyang understands well how important it is for the White House to approach the midterm

elections to the US Congress on November 6, 2018, with at least some success in eliminating the “North Korean nuclear threat.” That is why on the eve of these elections, the DPRK Foreign Ministry issued an official statement saying that North Korea is ready to resume the policy of building up its nuclear arsenal if the US does not begin to lift economic sanctions against it¹.

Thus, Washington is clearly given to understand that the elimination of one landfill is far from a solution to the entire problem of North Korean nuclear potential. But the train of inter-Korean talks on reunification, skillfully started during the so-called Olympic pause in February 2018, has already picked up speed and it will not be easy for the Americans to stop it, at least without the risk of causing serious complications in relations with South Korean allies. Therefore, counter concessions from Washington seem to date not such a high price for their acquiescence to Pyongyang’s agreeing to a meeting in Singapore.

The question remains about the pace and timing of Korean reunification on a confederation basis. As long as the reunification is not practical, all the actors of the “Gordian knot” do not skimp on the words in support of the restoration of the Korean unity. In fact, the formation of a powerful economic complex with a population of seventy-five million people in the heart of the promising Asia-Pacific region does not appeal to those financial and economic circles that have long considered themselves not only regional leaders in the Asia-Pacific region, but also the hegemon of the world economy as a whole. In this regard, the statement of President Obama about the ambitious plan of the TRANS-Pacific partnership (the TPP): “The world has changed. And the rules are changing with it. They should be installed by the US and not countries like China. Let’s take this opportunity to ratify the TRANS-Pacific partnership and make sure that America not only does not lose its stake, but also dictates the rules.”² But it is becoming increasingly difficult to dictate the rules even for such a powerful nation as the United States, especially, when we are talking about the powerful desire of a multimillion nation to unite. As for the Koreans in the North of the Peninsula, they still consider themselves a single nation with the southerners living under American occupation. But there is a desire to unite in the South as well. According to the results of a public opinion poll conducted by the Center for reunification and peace at Seoul State University, 59.8% of South Koreans are in favor of unification with the DPRK. 45.1% of advocates of reunification believe that it is necessary for the unity of the Korean people, 31.4% saw it as a necessity for

¹ North Korea has threatened to build up its nuclear arsenal if the US does not lift the sanctions. Information portal of Interfax. – 03.11.2018. – URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/world/636361> (Date of the application: 05.11.2018).

² President Obama: The TPP would let America, not China, lead the way on global trade, the Washington Post, May 2, 2016.

eliminating the threat of war, 12.9% consider it a condition for the transformation of a United Korea into a developed country”¹.

Of all the states in the region, Russia is perhaps most interested in the reunification of Korea. The restoration, or rather unblocking, of the TRANS-Korean railway would open a powerful flow of goods to Europe through Russia, both from South Korea and from Japan. The importance of this transport artery is evidenced by the fact that at the mention of it, experts raise the topic of the implementation of the now seemingly fantastic project of one hundred eighty-two kilometer tunnel from the Japanese Islands to Busan on the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula².

According to skeptics, the implementation of projects of a confederate reunification will inevitably be blocked by the political elite of the DPRK as soon as it will face the establishment of a large-scale cooperation and humanitarian contacts with the South of the Peninsula. They say that millions of North Koreans, having tasted the fruits of democracy and economic prosperity of the South, will immediately overthrow the totalitarian North Korean regime.

It is characteristic that this argument is most often used by those who have never been to Korea and judge the political situation on the Peninsula, using Western stereotypes of thinking. As for, for example, Russian specialists working in the DPRK, in their opinion, the calculations to undermine the situation in the country from the inside are devoid of any grounds. For example, General Director of Rasonkontrans, Russian-North Korean joint venture, I. Tonkih believes that “the North Koreans, are already monolithic, united and have an absolutely clear understanding that they are a single nation. Therefore, I would not say that sanctions can somehow shake them from the inside or pit the classes against each other. There are no classes there, there is one single nation”³.

Throughout the life of three generations, North Korea has developed its own stereotypes of thinking and values, including loyalty to the leadership of the state. This is the history of the country. And people are not ready to give it up. They understand that the southerners may live materially better, but as long as there are American troops in South Korea, Seoul will be regarded as Washington’s “puppet” in the world politics. In contrast, Pyongyang pursues an independent

¹ Almost 60% of South Koreans support unification with the DPRK. October 2, 2018. Izvestia information portal. – URL: iz.ru/795442/2018-10-02/pochti-60-zhitelei-iuzhnoi-korei-vystupaiut-za-obedinenie-s-knd (Date of the application: 05.11.2018).

² Japan and South Korea will be linked by the peace tunnel. TsIAN Information portal. February 15, 2008. – URL: <https://www.cian.ru/novosti-japoniju-i-juzhnuju-koreju-svjazhet-tunnel-mira-222712/> (Date of the application: 05.11.2018).

³ Experts spoke about the situation on the Korean Peninsula. Information portal – MK.ru electronic periodical. 10.05.2018. – URL: <https://vlad.mk.ru/social/2018/05/10/eksperty-rasskazali-o-situacii-na-koreyskom-poluostrove.html> (Date of the application: 05.11.2018).

course in both domestic and foreign policy. This cannot but impress the masses of Koreans, and not only in the North of the Peninsula.

In addition, the DPRK is carrying out economic reforms, opening the way for private initiative and entrepreneurship, developing private property, raising living standards, including its components, which are unknown in the South. In these circumstances, the current political elite of the DPRK has a real chance of survival and a worthy place in the political structure of the future Korean Confederation. The main thing for the Koreans-both in the South and in the North - is to get rid of the humiliating situation when the fate of the country is decided abroad. And in this regard, the DPRK is an example for South Korea, because despite all the difficulties Pyongyang has created a state whose ethical values can be questioned, but hardly anyone will challenge the truly independent nature of Pyongyang's policy after the leader of the most powerful state in the world "descended" to a separate summit with the leader of the DPRK.

The Gordian knot of inter-Korean settlement and denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is certainly complicated. But this complexity should be an incentive for vigorous attempts to untie it, not an excuse for passivity in anticipation of it being untied "on its own". Such expectation is fraught with disaster and, by no means, through the fault of the Korean parties, but due to the inability of non-regional forces to abandon their hegemonic approaches and ambitions. The world is becoming multipolar before our eyes. Indirectly, the White House was forced to recognize this, explaining its position on the Intermediate-range Missile Treaty by the presence of third countries in addition to the signatories of the current INF Treaty. And in this multipolar world, a real solution to complex problems can be found only with respect for the interests of all participants in a given situation.

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