

Russia can't be sidelined on Peninsula affairs

By Liu Jun

Russia's policy on the Korean Peninsula and its stance on the US-North Korea summit are based on how Moscow perceives its own diplomacy and diplomatic priorities.

The Korean Peninsula is not part of the core interest of Russia's policy-making realm. Most Russian elite believe that Moscow lacks the political and economic leverage needed to play a decisive role in North Korean affairs and therefore seeks limited involvement in Peninsula goings-on.

At the same time, Russia doesn't want to be excluded from Peninsula affairs and puts in effort so that it is not marginalized. Russian elite contend that exclusion from the issue means that Russia is likely to be excluded from the core of building the security order in Northeast Asia.

Russia hopes that it can play a role to provide strategic security and stability in the North Korea nuclear crisis, especially serve as the backbone for the security order in Northeast Asia. Russia is opposed to Pyongyang being pressured by the US and its allies and objects to these countries forcing North Korea to make unilateral compromises. In addition, it bucks any military moves by the US.

Although Russian thinkers support resuming the Six-Party Talks in the future, currently Russia involves itself in Peninsula affairs only through bilateral diplomacy.

The leadership on both sides maintains close contact. Russian President Vladimir Putin visited North Korea soon after becoming president in 2000. It was followed by a reciprocal visit by then North Korean leader Kim Jong-il. Since then, communication has remained frequent at the top level. Russia can serve as the third channel, besides China and the US, for North Korea to engage with the outside world. Pyongyang needs Russia to voice its opinion.

Meanwhile, Russia hopes to coordinate China's policy on Peninsula affairs. Moscow views Beijing as its strategic partner in the Asia-Pacific and accords it diplomatic priority. It supports China's stance on the North Korean nuclear issue within the framework of



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the UN Security Council. It also stands with China's "dual track" approach on the issue.

In recent years, Russia has walked closer to South Korea. The two sides share common interests in the development of Russia's Far East region. They also proposed the Russia/North-South Korea Transport Corridor, including a

railway connecting Russia's Far East to the Port of Busan via the Korean Peninsula, an oil and gas pipeline and electricity networks, and joint development of the Rason Special Economic Zone. This trilateral cooperation mechanism, backed by Russia and South Korea, will serve as a buffer for regional tensions and the nuclear standoff.

Russian elite are largely positive over the upcoming second summit between US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. But even if there is a détente between Washington and Pyongyang, it will not affect Pyongyang-Moscow ties and Russia's role in the nuclear issue.

First, even if North Korea makes compromises after talks with the US, Trump may not fully honor his promise made to Pyongyang. The second summit may lead to the signing of a peace treaty and ending tensions, but it is too early to think about the resolution of the Peninsula issue, mostly because Northeast Asia lacks the mechanism to provide a security guarantee to Pyongyang.

Second, North Korea needs Russia. On the one hand, North Korea hopes Moscow can help end sanctions imposed by the UN. On the other hand, a great number of North Korean workers make a living in Russia's Far East and they are the main source of North Korea's foreign currency reserves.

In the past two years, Russian media have reported on the possible meeting between Putin and Kim. Both are keen on meeting. For instance, ahead of the Eastern Economic Forum last year, it was reported that Kim would attend and meet Putin. In the future, the possibility of the two leaders meeting on the sidelines of such international event is not excluded.

In June last year, Putin invited Kim to Moscow. It is very likely that the two will meet this year. Notably, if the second Trump-Kim summit does not yield desired results, Kim would be more likely to meet Putin amid mounting pressure from the US. By visiting Russia, Kim can seek diplomatic gains on the nuclear issue and not solely rely on US "goodwill."

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European liberal democracies come together to fight populism, enforce multilateralism

Six European liberal democratic prime ministers declared in Helsinki, Finland on Tuesday that their parties are the "counter force to populism."

They also called for deepening of the EU single market and continued policies for competitiveness and sustainable growth.

The meeting convened by Finnish Prime Minister Juha Sipilä brought together Helsinki Charles Michel of Belgium, Lars Lokke Rasmussen of Denmark, Juri Ratas of Estonia, Mark Rutte of the Netherlands and Marjan Sarec of Slovenia.

The six prime ministers from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe group (ALDE), the liberal-centrist political group of the European Parliament, gave their declaration one day after the first official poll about the May European elections indicated that ALDE could increase its number of MEPs from the current 68 to 75.

In the bigger picture, the leading centrist-conservative (EPP) and social democratic parties (S&D) in the European Parliament would suffer major losses while populist and

nationalistic groupings would make gains. The poll by the European Parliament and Kantar was published on Monday.

Political observers have noted that ALDE could do even better, if the French En Marche movement would join ALDE.

Researcher Timo Miettinen, from the Center for European Studies at the University of Helsinki, told news agency Lannen Media that if En Marche does not find enough allies from other EU countries to form a new group, ALDE could be their most natural alternative.

Miettinen said one of the

factors behind the rise of ALDE is the return of the German liberal party to the European political scene. Rutte made a reference to possible future cooperation with En Marche in a press conference in Helsinki on Tuesday. On world issues, the six prime ministers said their priority is to promote "the rules-based international order and effective multilateralism."

They declared commitment to maintaining the effectiveness of existing World Trade Organization disciplines. "With its wide network of trade agreements, the EU gives a strong

signal that it is for open trade and against protectionism."

The six urged improvement in the transatlantic trade and investment relations.

"We must also develop our relations with Africa in a more balanced way." The EU should be a global leader in the fight against climate change.

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