

Analysis of the Impact of the Russia-North Korea Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement on the Eurasian Security System

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Abstract: Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, NATO's eastward expansion has overlooked Russia's security concerns, leading to increased regional tensions. The protracted Russia-Ukraine conflict has accelerated the evolution toward a multipolar world and discussions surrounding a new security system. The signing of the Russia-North Korea agreement not only continues 79 years of strategic interaction but also lays the groundwork for the Eurasian security system advocated by Putin. Furthermore, the principles of equality and non-interference emphasized in the agreement align closely with China's regional security concepts, providing a good opportunity for complementary cooperation between the Eurasian security systems proposed by China and Russia. Overall, the strategic cooperation between Russia and North Korea will have a profound impact on China's strategic layout and security policy in Northeast Asia, while also offering new ideas for addressing the complex international security environment.

Keywords: Eurasian Security System; Russia-North Korea Relations; Multipolarity; Russia-Ukraine Conflict

1. Introduction

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, NATO ignored Russia's regional security concerns and gradually expanded eastward, attempting to establish a unipolar international order. However, with the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the security situation in various regions has intensified, prompting non-NATO countries to increase discussions about multipolarity and the construction of a new security system. On December 4, 2024, the "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement" jointly signed

by North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and Russian President Vladimir Putin officially came into effect. This agreement not only represents a significant outcome of the high-frequency interactions between Russia and North Korea that began with Kim Jong-un's visit to Russia in September 2023, but also lays the groundwork for the "establishment of a Eurasian security system" mentioned by Putin in his address to the Federal Assembly in February 2024. Therefore, understanding the underlying logic of the signing of the Russia-North Korea "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement," its reference value for Russia's construction of a Eurasian security system, and the implications of the security system concept for China are of significant practical importance.

2. Background of the Comprehensive Partnership Treaty between Russia and North Korea

To analyze the current comprehensive strategic partnership between Russia and North Korea, it is essential to consider its historical background and political motivations. Diplomatic relations were established between the two countries following the end of World War II. As the geopolitical environment and developmental needs changed, the tone of their interactions exhibited different characteristics at various historical stages.

During the Korean War, the Soviet Union sent technical experts and advisors to assist the People's Army in combat. After the war, it initiated socialist construction in North Korea. The "Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement" signed in 1955 aided North Korea in restoring its industrial foundation and kickstarting economic development. As the Cold War began, the Soviet Union attempted to establish an alliance with North Korea through large-scale aid and ideological alignment. For

instance, in 1961, the two parties signed the "Soviet-North Korean Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance," which stipulated that if either party were to suffer armed aggression from any country or coalition of countries, the other party would immediately provide military and other assistance to ensure the security of the affected party. However, by the end of the 1960s, following the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, ideological differences emerged between North Korea and the Soviet Union, leading to a reduction in Soviet aid to North Korea, which also insisted on its own independent Juche ideology[1]. Subsequently, North Korean political figures ceased to mention the provision of free assistance from the Soviet Union. Overall, while both sides maintained a close socialist alliance, North Korea upheld its autonomy internally.

In the post-Cold War era, as the new Asian policy was implemented and "new thinking" emerged, the Soviet Union began to engage with South Korea, establishing diplomatic relations in 1990. By 1992, during a meeting between the presidents of the newly formed Russian Federation and South Korea, the "Basic Treaty on Relations between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Korea" was signed to strengthen friendly relations and promote cooperation in trade, culture, technology, and energy[2]. However, due to internal turmoil and ideological shifts in Russia, the "Soviet-North Korean Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance" was declared null and void in 1994, leading to a gradual cessation of aid to North Korea. This resulted in a rapid deterioration of the North Korean economy and famine. During this period, Russia lost its influence over the Korean Peninsula, prompting North Korea to pursue a path of national security autonomy.

After Putin came to power, he began to repair the relationship between the two countries. In 2000, the two nations signed the Treaty of Good-Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation, and in the 2001 Moscow Declaration, they emphasized the promotion of a just new world order system to expand the development of friendly relations between them. During the second North Korean nuclear crisis, Russia actively participated in the Six-Party Talks, re-engaging in the political framework of Northeast Asia. Regarding the nuclear issue and

the Korean Peninsula situation, Russia believes that denuclearization cannot be achieved in the short term; as a long-term goal, it can only be resolved through the formation of a multipolar mutual trust within the Northeast Asian security structure.

A historical review reflects that the relationship between Russia and North Korea has transitioned from ideological assistance to a mutually beneficial model based on regional rationality and realism. Politically, following the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Western countries initiated large-scale sanctions and strategic isolation against Russia. After taking office, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol adopted a hardline stance toward North Korea. In 2022, South Korea conducted five joint military exercises with the United States, with Japan participating in the exercises on September 30. The U.S., South Korea, and Japan also issued a joint statement targeting China and North Korea at the Camp David summit in August 2023, and they regularly hold high-level meetings on diplomacy and defense[3]. Meanwhile, they followed the U.S. in implementing comprehensive sanctions against Russia and providing military assistance to Ukraine. The ideological alliance formed by the U.S., South Korea, and Japan is reminiscent of the "Southern Triangle" during the Cold War, attempting to restore the Northeast Asian security situation to that era, which has forced Russia to abandon its long-standing policy of balance on the Peninsula. Additionally, North Korea has long faced international sanctions due to its nuclear issue, and under the dual impact of regional security challenges and international isolation, Russia and North Korea have once again initiated strategic cooperation.

Against this backdrop, the signing of the comprehensive partnership treaty between Russia and North Korea is not only a continuation of their strategic interactions over the past 79 years but also a practical strategic choice in the current complex geopolitical situation. The treaty's ratification will not only impact the bilateral relationship between Russia and North Korea and the security of the Northeast Asian region but will also provide a practical case for Russia's future Eurasian space policy.

3. The Concept of the Eurasian Security System and the Reference Significance of the

Russia-DPRK Treaty

The concept of Eurasia originally represented only the geographical notion of Europe and Asia. Through the continuous migration and integration of various ethnic groups, a cultural concept of the Eurasian space has emerged. As an important country developed from this space, Russia carries a rich historical and cultural heritage. It not only geographically connects Europe and Asia but also plays a bridging role in political, economic, and cultural exchanges. In the 19th century, Russian scholars recognized the long-term mutual influence of their national identity with Eastern nations and the need to avoid excessive Westernization, which gave rise to the idea of Eurasianism. During the Soviet period, Eurasianism began to transition from Great Slavic nationalism to a multipolar approach, acquiring political attributes. By the end of the 20th century, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the bipolar system, American values gained dominance in global politics and permeated the post-Soviet states. This led Russia to recognize threats and revive the idea of Eurasianism. To implement this strategy, Russia established organizations and projects such as the Eurasian Economic Union and the Eurasian Development Bank to promote economic integration in Eurasia and strengthen harmony and friendly relations among post-Soviet states.

In the security domain, Russia underwent a process of reconciliation with Europe following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Throughout the 1990s, it worked to enhance the role of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in maintaining security on the European continent, viewing the organization as an effective alternative to NATO's eastward expansion. However, the Kosovo War, NATO's continued eastward expansion, and attempts to deploy missile defense systems in Poland, the Czech Republic, and Romania, along with a series of Russian countermeasures, strained the reconciliation agenda in Europe[4].

Following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Russia adjusted its diplomatic policy, refocusing on strengthening cooperation with non-Western countries to seek new security guarantees and promote the establishment of a more multipolar international order. Against this backdrop, in 2024, Putin began calling for the establishment of a new security structure on the Eurasian continent to alter the current

geopolitical landscape. According to his statements, this security system will be open to all countries in Eurasia, establishing an equal and open dialogue framework, and enhancing dialogue processes with organizations such as the Collective Security Organization, the Eurasian Economic Union, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. It is worth emphasizing that this security paradigm also includes NATO and U.S. allies in Asia. In other words, the theoretically complete new framework will cover approximately 55 million square kilometers of land, accounting for about 36.2% of the Earth's land area. Over 5 billion people reside within this area, roughly 70% of the world's population. This includes major regional powers such as China, Russia, India, and Iran, smaller countries within the region, established intergovernmental organizations, as well as NATO member states or U.S. allies in Asia. More importantly, due to the principles of equality and indivisible security, the final security framework may present a decentralized system similar to Bitcoin. Therefore, when constructing communication mechanisms between countries and organizations, it is essential to ensure that they are trustworthy and transparent. The enhancement of the comprehensive strategic partnership between Russia and North Korea incorporates all factors outside NATO countries and U.S. allies in Asia. The recent signing of a comprehensive partnership agreement between Russia and North Korea has been widely characterized by Western countries as a move towards a renewed military alliance. However, some Chinese scholars have noted that this treaty is not akin to the military alliances formed by the United States with Japan and South Korea. Unlike the U.S. in recent years, which has established multilateral security mechanisms based on bilateral relations, the current demands from Russia and North Korea signal that regional security must be founded on principles of equal security[5]. As stated in the first article of the treaty, the strategic partnership is to be conducted under the principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in internal affairs, and equality. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the relationship between the two countries has long been characterized by equality, openness, and autonomy. In the trilateral interaction framework

involving China, Russia, and North Korea, there are also features of mutual independence, non-dependence, and non-coordination[6]. These characteristics provide a realistic reference for the construction of a Eurasian security system. During Putin's visit to China in May 2024, he also proposed related ideas. At a government meeting, Putin stated that "the Russian initiative is not in conflict with the principles of the global security initiative proposed by China; rather, it complements the relevant issues." This complementary strategic autonomy among the three countries can, to some extent, bridge the gaps created by the zero-sum game of the U.S.-Japan-South Korea military alliance, thereby avoiding a rigid situation of group confrontation. It creates conditions for easing the situation on the Korean Peninsula following Yoon Suk-yeol's departure and for establishing a multilateral dialogue mechanism.

However, at the same time, the signing of the Russia-North Korea partnership treaty has geopolitical limitations within Eurasia, as the peninsula is located at the edge of the Eurasian continent, and the interactive interests among Northeast Asian countries are quite evident. In contrast, Central Asia has long been referred to by geopolitical analysts as a "middle ground," surrounded by Russia, China, Turkey, and Iran, while the U.S. and the West have increased their investment efforts. Each country faces various internal issues such as religious conflicts, terrorism, and ethnic problems, which contribute to a diversified diplomatic environment in the region. Simply replicating this agreement could likely lead to heightened tensions and distrust among major powers in the region. Therefore, although the signing of this treaty reflects positive impacts such as establishing a dynamic balance within the region, facilitating multilateral dialogue among nations and organizations, and reducing the spillover effects of confrontational group politics, its effectiveness in other regions remains to be observed.

4. Impact on China and the Foundation for Strategic Cooperation

The signing of the comprehensive strategic partnership treaty between Russia and North Korea will undoubtedly alter the security environment in Northeast Asia, thereby affecting China's strategic layout and cooperation model

in the region. For a long time, China's core demand regarding the North Korean nuclear issue has been to peacefully resolve the denuclearization of North Korea, advocating for a "dual suspension" of the nuclear issue and the situation on the Korean Peninsula. The deepening of the Russia-North Korea partnership signifies that North Korea's stance on the international political stage may become increasingly resolute, especially in the face of external pressure. This shift could lead North Korea to respond more frequently with advanced missile tests when confronted with provocations from the U.S. and South Korea, thereby escalating the risk of military conflict.

Furthermore, in response to U.S. threats, the interaction among China, Russia, and North Korea is trending toward avoiding the escalation of conflicts. The principles of equality and non-interference emphasized in the Russia-North Korea treaty align closely with China's cooperative approach to regional security construction. This provides a foundation for China to enhance security interactions with Russia and North Korea and creates conditions for the alignment of China's policies with Russia's Eurasian security strategy.

Additionally, the signing of this treaty has been interpreted by Western media as a provocation to China's influence, with some Western scholars suggesting that China's lack of comment reflects a form of neutral restraint. In response to this, on November 29, 2024, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated during a press conference: "Both Russia and North Korea are sovereign and independent countries, and their bilateral interactions are matters between the two countries; China is not aware of the specific circumstances." This response not only firmly defends China's sovereignty and right to make independent decisions but also serves as a strong rebuttal to the West's smear campaigns and malicious interpretations of China-North Korea or China-Russia relations.

Using media to discredit and distort is a traditional tactic of the U.S. and Western countries. This instance is no exception, as there are attempts to negatively portray China's foreign policy and China-North Korea relations in order to gauge China's stance. Both Russia and North Korea are sovereign independent nations and are also neighbors of China, with close ties among the three countries. Future developments between Russia and North Korea

are bound to be excessively interpreted by Western media to disrupt public opinion in various countries. Therefore, it is imperative to consistently uphold the principle of cooperation among nations based on equality and non-interference and to oppose any external forces' interference and provocation.

In the realm of the Eurasian security system, Putin has clearly expressed his intention to strengthen active dialogue with organizations on the Eurasian continent, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the BRICS nations. This indicates that China is a crucial component in Russia's planning of the Eurasian security system. While China does not have a clear Central Asia-based Eurasian strategy, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has facilitated economic, security, and political exchanges with post-Soviet countries and is currently incorporating nations such as India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. In the economic domain, the integration of the Belt and Road Initiative with the Eurasian Economic Union may influence the economic interests of both China and Russia in Central Asia. How the two countries can avoid conflicts of interest and expand mutual exchanges may become an important topic for active Sino-Russian dialogue within the context of Eurasian concepts.

Moreover, in recent years, the resurgence of terrorism and its cross-border activities have significantly threatened regional stability. The attack on a concert hall near Moscow on March 22, 2024, resulted in 144 fatalities, while the coordinated terrorist attacks on June 23 led to the deaths of 16 police officers and several civilians, with the Islamic State's Khorasan Province claiming responsibility for both incidents. These events vividly illustrate the potential risks of terrorist activities on the Eurasian continent. In the face of such challenges, both China's emphasis on economic growth and Russia's focus on regional political stability necessitate cooperation on a more macro level[7]. Therefore, establishing dialogue platforms for counter-terrorism cooperation among multiple countries and organizations not only aligns with the interests of various Eurasian nations and organizations but also lays a solid foundation for maintaining security and stability across the entire Eurasian continent.

5. Conclusion

Through a historical review, it is evident that the

deepening cooperation between Russia and North Korea stems from a similar perception of the strategic environment and the complementarity of their interests. Eurasianism, alongside Russia's geopolitical shift towards multipolarity, has prompted a reevaluation of the establishment of a new security order. The principles of equality and non-interference emphasized in the Russia-North Korea Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement, along with the long-standing characteristics of equality, openness, and autonomy in their bilateral relations, provide a practical reference for the newly proposed Eurasian security system. Furthermore, several principles of the Eurasian security system align closely with the regional security concepts advocated by China, laying a solid foundation for complementary cooperation between China and this framework.

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