



## Russia's Position on the North Korea Crisis

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*North Korea's missile and nuclear tests destabilise the situation in the Asia-Pacific region and indirectly jeopardise the security of the Russian Federation. At the same time, Russia uses the tensions between the U.S. and North Korea to strengthen its international standing and further its rapprochement with China. Russia supports the Chinese proposals for a peaceful settlement of the situation with North Korea because it fears strengthening the U.S. military presence in the region.*

**North Korea Crisis.** North Korea speeding up its missile programme and recent large nuclear test are challenging regional security in East Asia. Since the start of 2017, the country has already conducted 15 ballistic missile tests, compared to the 27 tests carried out in the four years prior (2012–2016). On 4 and 28 July, it tested Hwasong-14 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), which could be armed with a nuclear warhead and used to reach the United States. In response to the North Korean test, the U.S. announced it had ended its “era of strategic patience,” which involved a gradual increase in pressure with the expectation that the North Korean authorities would denuclearise. However, this approach did not stop North Korea from conducting a sixth nuclear test, its largest ever and probably a hydrogen bomb, on 3 September, followed by another missile test on 15 September.

**Russia's Position.** The Russians believe that the source of the Korean crisis is the American policy towards the regime of Kim Jong Un. In response to North Korea, Americans want the sophisticated THAAD missile defence (MD) system set up in South Korea. Russia, in turn, supports China, which is not interested in having this system on the continent or a similar one in Japan. Russian President Vladimir Putin argues the need to seek alternative solutions and dialogue with North Korea. Russia supported the so-called “double freeze” plan, proposed on 8 March by China's foreign minister. It envisages North Korea stop its nuclear and missile tests. At the same time, South Korea and the U.S. would close military installations and end exercises on the peninsula. Russia would like to return to the so-called “sixth,” i.e., 2003–2009, round of negotiations on North Korea's missile and nuclear programme, in which the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia, and the U.S. participated. The reason for the breakdown of the talks was North Korea's withdrawal from them and subsequent breaches of agreements on control of its nuclear sector.

Russia's strategy towards North Korea consists of opening contacts with that country and, at the same time, refusing to recognise North Korea as a nuclear weapons state. In 2015, a year of friendship between the two countries was celebrated, and a year earlier, Russian authorities cancelled North Korean debt worth \$10 billion. In August, Russia launched a ferry connection with North Korea and agreed to open the first tourist agency, Nkorean, in Moscow. It also allowed in 30,000 North Korean workers. Putin also has proposed extending the trans-Siberian railway to the Korean peninsula and energy projects in both North and South Korea.

**Russia's Reactions.** In response to North Korea's missile tests this year, Russia deployed the 11<sup>th</sup> Army Missile Defence Systems to its Eastern Military District (EMD) and increased their state of readiness to constant. The closest base to North Korea is the of 93rd Missile Division in Vladivostok, which has four

S-300PS and two S-400 MD systems (a total of about 50 launchers). In Komsomolsk-on-Amur, eight S-300PS and two S-300V systems (80 launchers total) are stationed. Russia's Pacific Fleet, which also has MD systems, plays an important role. They are designed to shoot down short- and medium-range missiles, but North Korea has already tested a long-range missile intended to hit a faraway target (more than 5,500 km). Thus, the possibility of units in the EMD to protect the country is limited.

At the same time, in view of the situation on the Korean Peninsula, Russia has intensified its military cooperation with China. In 2016, joint Russian-Chinese computer-aided MD exercises took place. In September, both countries' navies held maritime exercises in the Ochocki Sea.

**Russia on North Korea Sanctions.** In 2017, Russia voted in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for three resolutions imposing sanctions on North Korea. On 2 June, the UNSC expanded the list of people not permitted entry to member countries and froze their assets; on 5 August, after the ICBM missile test, it banned North Korea from exporting lead and lead ore, iron and iron ore, coal, and seafood; and then on 11 September, after the hydrogen bomb test, the UNSC introduced a ban on imports of North Korean textiles, oil exports to that country, and the employment of North Korean workers. The last two resolutions are the most restrictive so far since they deal with trade from North Korea. They could reduce North Korea's budget by more than \$2 billion. The Russians have been in favour of further sanctions, although softened from their original, stronger form (e.g., no immediate deportation of North Korean workers).

However, the possibility of further Russian action through the UN is limited, since the U.S. has accused both Russia and China of supporting North Korea. On 22 August, the U.S. imposed sanctions on Russian and Chinese actors responsible for contacts with the North Korean regime (so-called "secondary sanctions") or for violating the existing restrictions (e.g. Russian construction company Gefest-M, which was accused of supplying metals to entities affiliated with North Korea's missile programme). Current practice shows that neither China nor Russia will completely end trade with North Korea despite imposed international sanctions (China's is worth \$5 billion and Russia's is \$100 million). This allows North Korea to ignore the external pressure.

**Conclusions.** Russia has joined the Chinese side in the rivalry with the U.S. over North Korea. Russia strives to discredit and reduce U.S. influence in the Asia-Pacific region. Russians blame American policy for the North Korea crisis. At the same time, the crisis is fostering closer political and military cooperation between China and Russia, but the benefits are more obvious for the Chinese. The Chinese gain an ally on affairs that worry them most (e.g., THAAD in South Korea), and in response, the Russians can count on support at the UN on Ukraine and Syria since China usually abstains from voting in the UNSC on such matters.

At the same time, the conflict on the Korean Peninsula is not in Russia's interest because it will lead to increased U.S. military presence in Japan and South Korea. Therefore, the Russian authorities are keen to resume talks on North Korea's missile and nuclear weapons programmes to be able to contribute shaping security in the region. However, the success of a "double freeze" is unlikely. The plan is unacceptable for Japan, which expects increased pressure on Kim Jong Un's regime. This strategy has also been adopted by American diplomacy. South Korea is more interested in the "double freeze" plan, so it is likely to tighten ties with Russia in that area.

Russia strives to solve the North Korea crisis within the so-called "sixth" round or some other Asian forum in which it could act as mediator. It is trying to build an image of Russian-Chinese peace partnership in the region. However, Russia's practice of implementing UN sanctions shows it first negotiates them to a minimum and then rarely observes them.

It is nearly certain the North Korea crisis will appear before the UNSC when Poland sits as a non-permanent member in 2018–2019. Poland is already expected to join the talks on North Korea, in part because of its many years of experience with the Neutral State Supervisory Commission in Korea.

### North Korean Missile and Nuclear Tests, 2017

Date	Type	Quantity	Distance (km)
12 February	Pukguksong-2	1	500
6 March	Scud variant	4	1,000
22 March	Hwasong-10* (probably)	1	Failed attempt
5 April	unconfirmed missile	1	60
6 April	Hwasong-12 (probably)	1	Failed attempt
29 April	Hwasong-12 (probably)	1	Failed attempt
14 May	Hwasong-12	1	790
21 May	Pukguksong-2	1	500
29 May	Scud variant	1	450
4 July	Hwasong-14	1	930
28 July	Hwasong-14	1	1,000
29 August	Hwasong-12	1	2,700
3 September	Hydrogen bomb	1	-
15 September	Hwasong-12	1	3,700

\*unconfirmed

Source: own elaboration based on data from *UN Expert Report*, United Nations Security Council, 5 September 2017, S/2017/742.