Putin and North Korea
Exploring Russian interests around the peninsula

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Introduction

So far, 2018 has seen significant changes in the tense US – North Korea relationship. In March, the White House announced its willingness to organise a meeting between President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, which Kim agreed to in April. The change in Kim’s rhetoric came a week after his surprise visit to China, where he held talks on the security situation on the Korean Peninsula. While those developments might stir optimism, the prospect of successful negotiations on a possible denuclearisation of North Korea should be regarded with caution.

Only a couple of months ago, the world was still witnessing a deterioration of the security context on the Korean Peninsula and consequently in the relationship between the US and the Kim regime. Missile and nuclear tests were followed by condemnation from the White House (and capitals around the world) and heavy tweeting and warnings by President Trump. Statements from Pyongyang reiterated former threats against the US. The window of opportunity...
for finding an acceptable and, especially, a peaceful solution seemed to be closing rapidly. The announced talks might be a first step towards a long-term resolution of security issues on the peninsula; however, history should teach us that earlier negotiations between the North’s regime and others were often attempted but remained without result or failed after initial agreements.\(^1\)

Therefore, this paper examines the potential involvement and interests of another often overlooked player: the Russian Federation.\(^2\) Russia is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a stakeholder in the region, a partner to Pyongyang and a party to the previous Six-Party Talks, so the Kremlin’s interests on the peninsula shouldn’t be ignored. North Korea’s Foreign Minister met with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, on 10 April, only a week after Kim’s visit to Beijing, indicating how important not only Chinese support but Russian backing of Pyongyang would be in the upcoming talks with South Korea and the US.

Pyongyang and Moscow are bound through a long historical relationship. Russia is one of the North’s few remaining economic partners, though with less economic leverage than China. Stronger engagement would allow the Russian Government to increase its weight in the region, affect US influence around the peninsula (and therefore in the immediate neighbourhood of Russia) and Northeast Asia, and allow President Vladimir Putin to advance his goals of a greater global presence and influence through Russia’s direct or indirect involvement in negotiations (obviously dictated by Russia’s own national interests and following its own set of rules).\(^3\)

This paper highlights different motivations that the Russian Government has to potentially play a bigger role in discussions and negotiations on security issues on the peninsula. The findings are based on analysis of official statements by Russian Government officials during 2017 and interviews with Russian North Korea experts conducted by the author in February 2018. The paper explores geopolitical, strategic, economic and national policy motivations that have led to Moscow increasingly looking east.

**Applying a historical lens to the relationship**

Due to the two countries’ geographical closeness (they share a border of 18 kilometres), Russia has maintained relations with Korea for centuries. Under the Tsars, the relationship was mainly economic, but it became more political during the Russo-Japanese War, which was fought over Korea. In the later part of the 20th century, Moscow intensified its relationship with North Korea and, after the USSR’s collapse, with South Korea. Since the beginning of the current millennium, Russia has managed to cooperate successfully and peacefully with Seoul while remaining one of the few partners of Pyongyang.

This partnership was coined by decades of Soviet support. After World War II, with the defeat of Japan in the Asia-Pacific, both the US and the Soviet Union ended the war in control of the Korean Peninsula—the former in the southern half, the latter in the northern. The Soviets installed Kim Il-sung, who had fled the peninsula and served in the Soviet Army, as the leader of North Korea in 1948, when the two Koreas emerged. Later, North Korea survived the Korean War only because of Chinese ground support and significant Soviet airpower during the conflict, and received much reconstruction aid in the postwar years from Moscow.

In 1961, the Soviet Union and North Korea signed a Friendship Treaty (officially, the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance), which until the mid-1990s committed them to mutual defence. During the USSR’s last years in the 1980s, the Soviets established diplomatic relations with the South, which led to stronger cooperation after the end of the Cold War. Relations with North Korea cooled significantly due to Russia’s opening to Seoul. The Russian Government then took part in international attempts to improve the situation on the peninsula, becoming one of the permanent members of the Six-Party Talks.

In recent years, Moscow and Pyongyang’s ties have deepened once more, although they’re far from the levels during the Soviet period. Bilateral contacts have focused on military cooperation and economic exchanges, and the Duma, Russia’s lower house, has reduced North Korea’s US$11 billion debt (including debt from Soviet times). Russia, alongside China, still supplies energy to North Korea. The Russian Far East benefits from an estimated 37,000 guest workers from North Korea, who are mainly working in construction. Following the latest round of UN sanctions, those workers will gradually be expelled, however, in a process that allegedly began in February 2018.\(^4\) Despite their shared aversion towards the US, Russia and North Korea are still far from being allies, let alone partners.
Russia’s interests on the peninsula

Solving the ‘North Korea issue’ isn’t a top priority for the Kremlin, but involvement could play a handy part in Putin’s greater strategy to expand Russia’s engagement in the world and manifest a global presence. Officials claim that Russia has worked towards that goal by being involved in the Syrian conflict and attempts to end it by defeating so-called Islamic State and supposedly by organising peace talks in Sochi and Astana; all of those actions certainly provoke international worries about Russia’s intentions.

Lastly, Russian involvement around the peninsula would allow the Kremlin to follow its own national interests in Northeast Asia. Russian Government officials have frequently commented on North Korean affairs, especially after missile and nuclear tests. The tests have always been condemned; for example, after the North Korean nuclear test in October 2006, Moscow reproached Pyongyang, stating that the test was a setback for nonproliferation and that it hoped North Korea would return to negotiations.  

Russia has so far supported consequential sanctions, but its statements may be no more than lip-service, as the two countries’ economic relations continue, often beyond the international limits. While the Russian Government denies it, US intelligence apparently shows that Russia is breaching sanctions by supplying gas and oil through ship-to-ship transfers.  

Despite the continuing relationship, the Russian Government does have a position that is based on several characteristics: the Kremlin opposes a nuclear North Korea and its development of nuclear and missile programs, it favours a stable peninsula, and it increasingly criticises the US presence and involvement in the region. Over 2017, the rhetoric coming from Moscow changed only in some nuances. First, the critique directed towards Washington became louder. On multiple occasions, Putin (rhetorically) asked how the US expected Russia to support the international community in addressing the issues on the peninsula while simultaneously placing Russia on the same level as North Korea (by applying similar sanctions on it). At the same time, Russia has shown interest and offered to take part in international attempts to find a peaceful long-term solution; for example, Putin told South Korea’s special envoy that he would be willing to send a diplomatic delegation to the peninsula to mediate.  

Possibly coincidentally with the growing activities of the Mueller investigation in the US, Moscow began blaming the deteriorating situation on the US. It began to repeatedly refer to the failure of the 2005–06 talks because of ‘someone’ wanting more—clearly not naming the US but referring to additional requirements that the US administration back then asked for, which was a factor that contributed to North Korea ignoring the outcome of the talks. Additionally, Russia has voiced criticism multiple times over US – South Korean military exercises, as well as the installation of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) systems in South Korea, arguing that this would only contribute to worsening the situation. However, when Russia comments on the exercises and THAAD, it’s pretty clear that it’s thinking of its own security and threat perceptions rather than arguing in favour of North Korea. Beyond this, Russia has a variety of larger interests at stake, aside from pushing to be included in any form of negotiations on a long-term solution to North Korea’s nuclear program and the peninsula’s security issues.

Geopolitical and strategic interests

Moscow’s main geopolitical and strategic interests can be summarised as establishing a security architecture in Northeast Asia, affecting US influence in the region, and achieving an end state in which the Korean Peninsula remains in its current two-state form but is denuclearised in the long term.

Russia has a vital interest in preventing a regional ‘snowball’ effect in which other countries follow Pyongyang and start to develop their own nuclear weapons, missile programs, or both, making international agreements on (non-)proliferation obsolete. Russia would be facing a very different situation in Northeast Asia if Japan or South Korea were to decide to develop their own programs to boost their capabilities.
Deputy Minister of Defence Alexander Fomin spoke extensively on North Korea at the July 2017 Shangri-La Dialogue. Fomin voiced concern over Pyongyang’s behaviour and called for a return to negotiations while at the same time blaming the US for aggravating the issue through its reactions. Fomin stressed that a new arms race was possible as a result of the situation spiralling out of control. He highlighted Russia’s interest in creating a long-term security architecture in the Asia–Pacific based on ‘indivisible security, respect for the international law, peaceful resolution of disputes and conflicts, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states’, but without saying what that new ‘architecture’ might be. It’s hard to see his statement as credible, judging from Russia’s and China’s current behaviour against most of those criteria.

Before the BRICS summit in September 2017, Putin published an op-ed in major news outlets in the participating member states titled ‘Towards new horizons of strategic partnerships’, in which he also touched upon North Korea. He pledged to create a fair, multipolar world. He also stated that pressuring North Korea into stopping its nuclear program was ‘misguided and futile’. Putin advocates for a dialogue of all involved parties without setting any preconditions for that dialogue—a reference to prior White House policies of expecting denuclearisation prior to any talks. Putin put forward his support of the road-map suggested by China and Russia, which involves a double freeze: an end to joint US – South Korean military exercises and a North Korean freezing of its nuclear and missile programs before all parties return to the negotiating table. Hinting at President Trump’s tweeting excesses, he commented that ‘insulting rhetoric [is] a dead-end road’.

Russia’s main interest in the road-map, however, would be in controlling US influence around the Korean Peninsula and in the Asia–Pacific more generally. Containing US power in the region is of high importance to Russia (and China). However, even as the relations with the US are further deteriorating, finding a solution to the North Korea issue will require at least some sort of cooperation between the powers. In his annual press conference in December 2017, Putin touched upon the topic several times. He repeated rhetorical questions on how the White House could expect Russia to address the North Korea problem as well as the Iranian nuclear program while at the same time grouping Russia with both countries in a sanctions regime, but ended by stating that Russia would be open to cooperating with the US on ‘all such issues, including North Korea’. Whether Putin is serious about that remains questionable.

Putin made clear to his audience that the Russian Government wouldn’t recognise North Korea’s nuclear status, but at the same time claimed that North Korea didn’t have any other choice but to develop weapons of mass destruction in the interest of self-preservation. During a press conference after the BRICS summit, for the first time Putin began using an analogy for North Korea’s behaviour by referring to what happened to the leaders of Iraq (Saddam Hussein) and Libya (Muammar Gadaffi) when they abandoned their weapons of mass destruction. While he condemned the steps taken by North Korea, he stated that no-one can forget what had happened in Iraq and Libya.

Economic interests

Russia’s economy is performing poorly, so economic interests are high on the Kremlin’s agenda. To be globally more influential, it must invest to cover the costs of the country’s military forces. Stabilisation on the Korean Peninsula and a consequentially more stable Northeast Asia would make investments in the Russian Far East more attractive to both national and international stakeholders. The Kremlin hopes for slow growth across the country, to gradually compensate for affects caused by international sanctions that were applied following Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Security and stability around the peninsula would also allow for more regional economic partnerships. The peninsula alone offers a huge prospect as an energy market. With a growing population of more than 50 million, South Korea is a lucrative energy client. Since President Moon Jae-in was elected in South Korea in early 2017, relations between Russia and South Korea have increased, as has Russian interest in closer engagement. Putin assured Seoul that the Russian Government would continue to strengthen peace, security and stability on the peninsula and in the surrounding region. Interactions between both governments as well as several statements by Russian Government officials repeated the president’s assurances. Among others, the first meeting of the Russian–Korean Forum for Interregional Cooperation was agreed to take place in 2018.
However, at the moment, Russia can’t rely on supplying energy products overland to the southern half of the peninsula, as North Korea is situated in between. Even if North Korea were to allow energy to transit to the south, its poor infrastructure wouldn’t be able to support high economic engagement between Russia and South Korea. Russian engineers are ready to change that, as the Russian Government has concrete investment plans to advance infrastructure in North Korea—obviously motivated by self-interest.\(^\text{14}\)

At the Eastern Economic Forum in 2017, Putin assured (mainly his domestic audience) that economic activities wouldn’t come to a halt in the Russian Far East and beyond as a consequence of the unstable situation on the peninsula. He advocated for the inclusion of North Korea in economic cooperation in the region, as its exclusion would only worsen the situation. The president reiterated earlier ideas about Russian economic cooperation with the North on railways, pipelines and port development. He also advocated North Korea’s inclusion in a regional energy ring,\(^\text{15}\) which is another project underlining the Kremlin’s intent to explore new markets and establish new cooperation formats in regions other than Central Asia, where the Eurasian Economic Union has no power to make up for the impeded economic relations with the EU and others, which have slowly been taking a toll after the sanctions.

National policy interests

Creating new economic partnerships in the region might help provide a much-needed boost to the tumbling Russian economy, which would allow the Kremlin to further please domestic audiences. One simple motivation for Russia to be involved in finding a solution to the unstable situation in Northeast Asia is its aversion to the increasing use of sanctions as a foreign policy tool. Russia has been subjected to international sanctions since its 2006 nuclear test. Despite strong sanctions—and certainly due to some countries circumventing them—the Kim regime is still in place. The country hasn’t collapsed as has sometimes been predicted since the 1990s. Pyongyang has managed not only to achieve some small economic growth but also to develop a certain level of missile and nuclear capabilities. If the sanctions had caused the North’s collapse, or potentially even triggered regime change, Vladimir Putin and his close followers would have faced a bigger challenge at home. In the current situation, they can both assure their people that sanctions won’t damage them significantly and argue internationally against the use of sanctions as a punishment due to ‘insufficiency’.

At the BRICS summit, Putin stated that sanctions of any kind would be useless and ineffective.\(^\text{16}\) He further asserted that North Korea wouldn’t give up its nuclear and missile program, saying that the North Koreans ‘will eat grass but they will not abandon this programme unless they feel safe’. Questioning the use of sanctions in official statements during the second half of 2017 was the beginning of an increasing use of this analogy in all official statements regarding the security situation on the peninsula.

Aside from demonstrating the alleged inefficiency of sanctions to its domestic audience, the Russian Government pursues another objective aimed both at the population at home and at the international community: it claims that Russia is once again an influential actor on the world stage. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov claimed in an interview in December 2017 that Russia had ‘reclaimed its historically sought-after role as a guarantor of global stability’ (based on Russian involvement in the Syrian conflict), while at the same time assuring the interviewer that the government would continue to engage to prevent armed confrontation on and around the Korean Peninsula.\(^\text{17}\)

What do Russian North Korea experts say?

While the Russian Government’s official statements are all following a similar line in 2017, with only some slight changes in tone towards the US and on sanction policies, Russian North Korea experts have their own take on the situation.\(^\text{18}\) Due to the historical relationship between the two countries, Russian (and former Soviet) analysts are some of the most knowledgeable experts on the issue due to their long-time access to the otherwise walled-in country. However, their views are divided: some are significantly
influenced by official Kremlin positions, while others opt for more drastic options. The nuclear specialists and strategy planners focus on nonproliferation, unlike the foreign policy experts, and believe that the Kim regime should be opposed and dismantled to teach any other aspiring nuclear states a lesson.\(^\text{19}\)

Some experts are convinced that the Russian Government won’t risk further deterioration of the country’s relationship with the US, although their grounds for saying so focus mainly on North Korea \textit{per se}. They assess that North Korea isn’t important enough and high enough up on the Kremlin’s international agenda to risk creating unnecessary tensions with Washington, and that Russia has nothing major to gain from a serious change of the situation on the peninsula.\(^\text{20}\) For example, the only advantage of a unified Korea would be cheaper transportation costs for Russia’s energy and other exports. However, lower costs aren’t worth the risk of a costly conflict. What this approach neglects is the facet of Kremlin decision-making that focuses on affecting US security, economic and political interests as a thing of its own intrinsic value because it demonstrates Russian strength.

It remains an open question whether Russia would act at all if the US decided to mount any pre-emptive military action, especially whether it would act purely in defence of North Korea. Certainly, the Russian Government would wait to see how China reacts, and would undoubtedly act should its own national security (and territorial) interests be affected. In contrast to China, which has been willing to provide aid and support to the North Korean regime ‘for free’, Russia has a purely commercial interest and doesn’t ‘provide presents’, as one expert stated. Therefore, it can be expected that the latest (illegal) shipments of oil from Russia were paid for.\(^\text{21}\)

Despite the current impression of the Kremlin as an advocate of Pyongyang, Kim Jong-un is quite unpopular in Russia, which has a long tradition of aversion to North Korea. He’s disliked among the Russian population, even more than Westerners are at the moment (an admittedly low bar). The Kremlin needs to take into account this domestic scepticism towards any involvement beyond diplomatic actions, should it be considered at all.

Georgy Toloraya, one of Russia’s experts, publishes regularly on the Kremlin’s options on the peninsula. He argues that Russian cooperation with the US on the North Korea issue could counterbalance China’s presence and influence in the region. He sees a major opportunity for Russia to shape Northeast Asian security in the long term. That would include creating a nuclear-free zone in and around Korea. However, he also admits that ‘a nuclear but peaceful Korean peninsula would be a better outcome than a war-torn Northeast Asia’.\(^\text{22}\)

Overall, Russia’s priorities can be defined following a three-step priority list. Of utmost importance is a stable North Korea and stability across the peninsula, as this would play out most beneficially for the Kremlin’s own interests. Next is a divided Korea—something that’s rarely stated officially. And of lower priority still is a non-nuclear Korea—a position that’s been extensively repeated by state officials in Moscow. The preferred outcome for the Kremlin is keeping the peninsula in its current organisational form, enhanced by stability; the preferred outcome of any talks between affected parties would be a promise to keep that form.\(^\text{23}\)

Quo vadis? Options for Russia and beyond

When it comes to moving forward in the fraught security situation in Northeast Asia, the main players seem to be clear: North Korea, South Korea, the US and China (and a subsidiary Japan as another member of the Six-Party Talks). However, the analysis above has shown that the Russian Government also has multiple interests at stake and should therefore not be sidelined automatically. The recent visit of North Korea’s Foreign Minister to Russia also underlines that Pyongyang counts Russia among those that should be closely involved in the process of finding a long-term solution to instability around the peninsula.

Even with the recent inter-Korean summit from 27 April and Kim’s announced meeting with President Trump, the situation remains unpredictable. The reliability of North Korea is highly questionable, as it has committed multiple breaches of agreements and promises in the past. North Korea doesn’t trust anyone, and guarantees are seen as mere pieces of paper, based on the US’s handling of security guarantees to Libya, Iraq and Ukraine. For North Korea, its nuclear program is as ‘precious as its own life’.\(^\text{24}\)
The window of opportunity is closing, especially with the threat of North Korea continuing to develop its program and gaining operational capabilities in the meantime.

The Kremlin currently has two options: to be involved passively or actively. Playing a passive role would simply mean supporting negotiated bilateral and multilateral agreements. However, that wouldn’t align with its greater ambitions to reassert global influence and be actively involved in issues of international concern. In regard to the security issues around the peninsula, that could involve being directly involved in negotiating the future of security agreements for both North Korea and South Korea, arrangements for Pyongyang’s missile and nuclear programs, and stability assurances in the wider region of Northeast Asia.

Whether the talks between the North and the South as well as with the White House will bring satisfactory results for all affected parties remains to be seen. Talks in the past have failed, owing mainly to widely divergent strategic interests among the multiple parties involved. In that case, Russia could become even more actively involved as a potential organiser of international talks or negotiations. However, the Kremlin’s motivation for such a role and whether the international community, especially the US, would accept Russia in that role given the current political circumstances remain open to speculation.

Nevertheless, according to the experts, the Kim regime sees Russia as the least unreliable stakeholder among all affected parties. That could speak in Russia’s favour should North Korea be wanting another stakeholder to be involved in direct talks between Pyongyang and Seoul and with Washington.

Both sides in the conflict will need to make concessions. The US (and the international community) could offer to loosen sanctions on North Korea in parallel to Pyongyang agreeing to freeze its nuclear and missile programs while giving access to the country to observers from the International Atomic Energy Agency. Should the Kim regime breach the conditions, bilateral or multilateral sanctions are an easy tool to be put in place again. This could be a first step towards mutual talks. The likelihood of the talks succeeding will increase if both the nuclear issue and the security concerns are addressed at the same time.

Ideally, the Korean Peninsula will be nuclear-free one day. That, however, is a long-term goal and it’s unrealistic to make it a prerequisite for holding talks. For now, short-term goals should be concentrated on—primarily, returning to the negotiation table. Current developments are promising but should be assessed with caution. The international community, and especially directly affected stakeholders, need to understand that Kim will only concede if he is offered something in return.

Conclusion

Recent developments have seen slow progress on security issues on the Korean Peninsula. At the time of writing, the 2018 Inter-Korean summit has just taken place and a meeting between Kim Jong-un and Donald Trump is planned. However, preparedness for the possibility of the talks failing is essential, as is awareness of stakeholders with interests around the peninsula.

The Russian Federation remains too often a discounted or overlooked stakeholder in the region, despite a long historical economic and political connection to the peninsula. Russian officials regularly condemn missile and nuclear advances by North Korea. At the same time, they pursue their own interests by showing an interest in greater involvement in international attempts to solve the security issues in Northeast Asia.

With deteriorating relationships to its west, Moscow continues to look east to advance regional cooperation and presence throughout the Asia–Pacific. The Kremlin’s strategic and geopolitical interests would see US presence on and around the peninsula reduced and nuclear proliferation by regional states halted at the same time. The consequential stability would create more attractive conditions to spark investment in and development of the Russian Far East as well as offering opportunities to enlarge economic—especially energy—cooperation in the region. By being involved in negotiations on a solution to the issues around the peninsula, the Russian Government could demonstrate to its domestic audience that, contrary to international commentators, the government is globally involved and needed. Another side effect of North Korea potentially gaining admittance throughout the talks would be that the Kremlin could demonstrate that international sanctions aren’t able to influence or change regimes.
Moscow is seen as an important player by Pyongyang. Any international agreements regulating security in Northeast Asia would need Russia’s support to be sustainable. Whether Russia would take an active or a more passive role in potential future negotiations with Pyongyang depends on the outcomes of the recent talks with Seoul and planned meeting with Washington, and also on how far the international community would agree to have Moscow as a facilitator following the recent deterioration in its relations with the West. As elsewhere in the world, the Kremlin is driving its own agenda in Northeast Asia. Much will depend on whether Moscow is actively offering to organise talks, or whether it is reacting to calls from Pyongyang, Beijing or even Washington. Should the Kremlin be successful in its involvement in negotiations on security issues on the peninsula, the international community needs to be prepared for Moscow to ask for a price, as it’s unlikely that Russia would be satisfied by achieving some of its own interests only in this region.

Notes
2 One example was the recent North Korea Summit held in Vancouver, Canada, in early 2018; representatives from China and Russia were not invited to attend.
3 The most recent example of increasing Russian activities in this regard are the Sochi talks and the Astana process attempting to find peace in Syria.
4 ‘Россия начала высылку северокорейских рабочих’, Interfax, 7 February 2018, online.
5 ‘Russia absolutely condemns the nuclear test carried out by North Korea’, President of Russia, 9 October 2018, online.
7 Samuel Ramani, ‘Why is Putin backing North Korea? To build up Russia as a great power’, Washington Post, 26 July 2017, online.
9 Vladimir Putin, ‘Towards new horizons of strategic partnership’, President of Russia, 1 September 2017, online.
10 ‘Vladimir Putin’s annual news conference’, President of Russia, 14 December 2017, online.
11 ‘Vladimir Putin’s news conference following BRICS Summit’, President of Russia, 5 September 2017, online.
12 ‘Российско-корейские переговоры’, President of Russia, 6 September 2017, online.
13 ‘Press statements following talks with President of the Republic of Korea Moon Jae-in’, President of Russia, 6 September 2017, online.
14 For a detailed analysis, see Elizabeth Buchanan’s forthcoming ASPI publication on the Russian – North Korean energy relationship.
15 ‘Plenary session of the Eastern Economic Forum’, President of Russia, 7 July 2017, online.
16 ‘Vladimir Putin’s news conference following BRICS Summit’, President of Russia, 5 September 2017, online.
17 ‘Sergei Lavrov: Russia has reclaimed its historical role as guarantor of global stability’, Interfax, 28 December 2017, online.
18 The author conducted interviews with both Russian and Australian North Korea experts to broaden her understanding of respective perspectives and interests. In order for them to speak their minds freely, they will remain anonymous.
19 Interview with Russian North Korea expert, February 2018.
20 Interview with Russian North Korea expert, February 2018.
21 Faulconbridge et al., ‘Exclusive: Russian tankers fueled North Korea via transfers at sea—sources’.
22 Georgy Toloraya, ‘Can diplomacy work with North Korea?’, 38 North, 13 December 2017, online.
23 Interview with Russian North Korea expert, February 2018.
24 Colin Dwyer, ‘North Korea pens singular, scathing criticism of its singular ally, China’, NPR, 4 May 2017, online.
25 Interview Russian North Korea expert, February 2018.

Acronyms and abbreviations
BRICS Brazil, Russia, India, China
EU European Union
THAAD Terminal High Altitude Area Defence
UN United Nations
US United States of America
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