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**MOSCOW, SEOUL, AND
SOVIET STRATEGY
IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION**

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Stephen J. Blank

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The revolution that followed the abortive and counterrevolutionary Soviet coup of August 1991 opened a new page in Russian history. The possibility of an overall democratic reconstruction of all aspects of state policy beckoned as a possible reality for the first time since 1917. An important sector of that state policy was and remains Soviet or Russian policy towards the Asia-Pacific region. This report uses evolving Soviet policy in 1990-91 towards the Korean conflict as the fulcrum of a broader discussion of the struggle within Soviet politics between new and old thinking in regard to Asian policy. Focusing on Korean affairs but not exclusively so, this essay examines the rivalry between these two schools in the context of a policy whose evident strategic objective was to isolate Japan and reduce the American military presence, both conventional and nuclear, in that region.					
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FOREWORD

The revolution that followed the abortive and counterrevolutionary Soviet coup of August 1991 opened a new page in Russian history. The possibility of an overall democratic reconstruction of all aspects of state policy beckoned as a possible reality for the first time since 1917. An important sector of that state policy was and remains Soviet or Russian policy towards the Asia-Pacific region, the subject of this report.

This report uses evolving Soviet policy in 1990-91 towards the Korean conflict as the fulcrum of a broader discussion of the struggle within Soviet politics between new and old thinking in regard to Asian policy. Focusing on Korean affairs but not exclusively so, this essay examines the rivalry between these two schools in the context of a policy whose evident strategic objective was to isolate Japan and reduce the American military presence, both conventional and nuclear, in that region.

While the old and new thinkers fought mightily over policy towards all the states involved in this region, fundamental geopolitical and strategic issues also made themselves felt in both policy lines. This was particularly true with regard to Gorbachev's proposals for naval and strategic disarmament in both the broader region and more narrowly in Korea. Important military and strategic considerations of naval and air deployment and warfare strongly affected both past and future Soviet policy frameworks. For the conservatives such considerations dictated a continuing offensive posture and effort to shape military policy by deploying carrier-based air to the area in order to expand the envelope of unhampered Soviet naval activity in the event of hostilities. Similarly, political considerations at home and abroad dictated close ideological ties with the Chinese government, fresh from its suppression of reform at home in 1989, and continuing arms transfers to North Korea. For new thinkers, carrier deployments and continuing ideologically charged policies only perpetuated the

suspicion of important and stronger states in the region such as Japan, South Korea, and the United States concerning Soviet aims. Thus such policies also inhibited effective and profitable Soviet participation in Asia.

The revolution beginning in August 1991 offers the promise of a breakthrough in that latter direction. But only time will tell if the beleaguered Soviet economy and political system is capable of engaging Asia on the terms needed to effect that democratizing process.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Karl W. Robinson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "K".

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Colonel, U.S. Army
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

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MOSCOW, SEOUL, AND SOVIET STRATEGY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

The Soviet rapprochement with South Korea was a major diplomatic event of 1990. By consummating this breakthrough Moscow established itself as an inevitable "dialogue partner" in any future settlement of the Korean conflict. Resolution of this conflict or at least steps towards that end were Moscow's highest priority in Asia in 1990.¹ The opening of relations with the Republic of Korea (ROK) has led Soviet commentators to claim that Moscow has decisively forsworn its former ideologically based policies of Socialist Internationalism. Policies based on that formula effectually transferred class struggle onto the international stage. Now a policy of realism that is based on concrete interests will be applied.²

Arms control agreements for the Korean peninsula are one of those interests. Indeed, they appear to be a major interest in Soviet Asian policy. Inasmuch as the inter-Korean border remains the most dangerous one in terms of superpower proxies and hence superpower conflict, a Soviet policy based on new thinking and conflict resolution by political means indicates Soviet goals for Korea and Asia. Therefore careful examination of Soviet perspectives on Korean arms control sheds light upon the depth of the change to a new Soviet Asian policy.

Since Moscow does not directly participate in the balance of military forces on the peninsula, these perspectives are not couched in a formal negotiating paper or position. Rather they emerge from the statements of Soviet politicians or spokesmen. And many of them antedate cross recognition with Seoul by several years. The oft proclaimed goals of denuclearization of Asia, creation of nuclear free zones in Korea and across the Asian-Pacific region, a freeze in air and naval forces there, and restrictions on naval force movements and deployments all go back to the Vladivostok and

Krasnoyarsk speeches of Gorbachev in 1986 and 1988. So, too, do many of the suggestions for confidence-building measures concerning superpower naval forces, and for withdrawal of U.S. forces from Korea as part of a settlement there. As a matter of fact, many of these calls for arms control and confidence-building measures, as well as for collective security in Asia date back to the Brezhnev period. Thus the continuity in Soviet arms control and security proposals is substantial notwithstanding the genuine innovations of new thinking.³ These arms control proposals are tirelessly repeated by Soviet spokesmen and clearly a Korean settlement process would involve a substantial Soviet effort to realize them either in part or in whole.⁴

For example, Mikhail Nossov, writing in 1989 in *Asian Survey* stated that Moscow supports Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) proposals for converting all Korea into a nuclear free zone, joint reductions of forces to 100,000 men by 1992 in harmony with a phased withdrawal of U.S. forces and nuclear weapons from the South, and high-level talks on military affairs between the DPRK, ROK, and United States on political affairs between the DPRK and ROK.⁵ Soviet proposals for arms control and conflict resolution are also part of the process of bilateral and multilateral agreements among interested states that would then provide the scaffolding for an overall collective security scheme in Asia which Moscow has insistently advocated since 1969.⁶

Finally, it must also be noted that both Soviet and PRC figures have privately and publicly told the United States that they would not support an attack by Pyongyang on South Korea. More recently it appears that both the PRC and the USSR, by virtue of their rapprochement, have successfully brought pressure to bear on North Korea to open up its nuclear program for international inspection, although this is not conclusive as of mid-1991. They also apparently agreed that both Koreas could enter the U.N. separately and that this would enable the U.N. to play a positive role in peaceful resolution of the Korean conflict.⁷ However, this formulation leaves unresolved the issue of ambiguous situations that could lead to conflict and does not fully assuage ROK security concerns.⁸

While moving towards rapprochement with Seoul, Moscow still has made sure to support North Korea's arms control initiatives concerning denuclearization, withdrawal of American troops, and so on, even as it publicly finds merit in South Korean positions.⁹ Thus Moscow has publicly embraced the ongoing inter-Korean dialogue even as it supports the North Korean disarmament proposals of May 1990.¹⁰ But it also churns out propaganda stating that unilateral American withdrawals from South Korea do not change the "essential nature" of U.S. force presence there in perpetuating the peninsula's divisions.¹¹

In short, Moscow is attempting to perform a remarkable balancing act. On the one hand it has supported the North Korean proposals for disarmament of 1988 described below.¹² On the other hand, Soviet analysts were already developing ideas about confidence-building measures either between the superpowers or the two Korean states that they published in 1989-90 in a conscious effort to prod Pyongyang further. In 1984 and 1988 Pyongyang advocated a tripartite conference with it, Seoul, and Washington. First, American troops would have to withdraw as part of a bilateral North Korean-U.S. treaty. Then Pyongyang would be willing to issue a nonaggression pact with Seoul. Not only did this establish a precedent bypassing Seoul, it also bypassed Moscow, Beijing, and Tokyo, a point that Moscow in particular must have forcefully brought home to North Korea.¹³ During 1989-90 it also became clear that Seoul's success in achieving both political stability at home as well as recognition from Soviet and East European states, plus Soviet pressure to climb aboard the train of new thinking, threatened Pyongyang with isolation and continuing economic stagnation if it did not alter its proposals.

Soviet suggestions, voiced in both domestic and foreign forums, included troop pullbacks from present lines, advance notification of maneuvers, regular meetings of military officials, reconfiguring units at the forward edge of the battlefield to reduce potential surprise offensives, creation of zones on both sides of the DMZ where offensive weapons would be banned, and hot-line type mechanisms for communication between

both sides' national command authorities to facilitate crisis management and prevent crisis escalation. The superpowers would duly begin a dialogue on Korea (which they did) to explore confidence-building measures and the reduction of threats to security and/or stabilizing measures that could ultimately bring about a six-power dialogue including the two Koreas, the superpowers, China, and Japan.¹⁴ A basic objective of the Soviet program was and remains the effort to secure, through this or an analogous process, a recognized status as guarantor of a peaceful status quo in all of Korea, thus giving it a veto over subsequent changes in the "regime" established on the peninsula.¹⁵ That has been a constant and longstanding global aim of the USSR in all regional conflicts in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and would secure by politics what has been denied to the USSR by its previous policy of intimidation and arms buildups.

By May 1990, Pyongyang, probably under pressure from Moscow and Beijing, offered a program for both Korean states to issue a nonaggression pact, limit the size of exercises, give prior notification of maneuvers, establish a hot-line between both sides' military commanders, halt qualitative improvement of military equipment including foreign arms, and develop means of verifying arms reductions including on-site inspections and removal of military equipment from the DMZ. Direct talks between the two Koreas, rather than with Washington first, would also take place.¹⁶ By September 1990, after the Roh Tae Woo-Gorbachev meeting in San Francisco, the Far Eastern tour of then Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, and the tremendous pressure of the impending Soviet recognition of Seoul, North Korea moved still further. It modified its insistence on immediate American troop withdrawals to a phased withdrawal of troops and nuclear weapons, and a three-stage inter-Korean troop reduction program to less than 100,000 men each by 1993-94. Once again the DPRK called for hot lines between military commanders and now added a call for a joint military group to resolve border disputes, on-site inspection, and the creation of a neutral force to monitor arms control in the DMZ.¹⁷

Moscow has clearly supported and encouraged North Korea's evolutionary policy and the DPRK's search for contacts with Tokyo and Washington that its own move towards Seoul has generated. Indeed, it appears that the Soviet move towards the South has led the DPRK to approach Japan in much faster and franker fashion, going more directly to the major issues on their agenda than Japan wishes to go.¹⁸ Soviet spokesmen also are offering proposals for further arms control measures that appear to trade withdrawal of American nuclear weapons for North Korean adherence to a non-nuclear status under International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) verification, a moratorium on superpower arms transfers to both Korean states, and a reduction in both size and frequency of the ROK-U.S. "Team Spirit" maneuvers.¹⁹ In this regard Moscow is trying to turn North Korea's obduracy on military and nuclear issues against the United States. Accordingly one recent Soviet commentary states that:

While trying to rule out even the possibility of the development of nuclear weapons in the DPRK, we should not forget that there is an excess of such weapons at U.S. military bases in the southern part of the peninsula. The demand of the DPRK to have them removed is quite legitimate. Given the current situation, the U.S. view of these weapons as containing the superior combat might of North Korea appears obsolete.²⁰

In another article outlining these ideas Ivanov also appears to hint at Soviet political goals in the region. He sees Moscow as outstripping every other foreign power in its ties with both sides and as the leading force pushing from without for a settlement of the Korean conflict. According to Ivanov, Moscow is already acting out the role of a mediator suitable to both Korean sides as well as to the United States and the force prodding Pyongyang into a DPRK "Sudpolitik" to the West.²¹

Moscow, Seoul, and Pyongyang: An Intricate Minuet.

In short, the Soviet initiative to South Korea is part of a broader political strategy to win for itself an unassailable position as an "interlocuteur valable" (reliable interlocutor or dialogue partner) in the solution of all security problems in Northeast Asia and beyond. That process serves as prologue

to the grand denouement of the collective security goal pushed since 1969 and in renovated form since 1985-86. Soviet recognition of South Korea is the USSR's entry fee to discussions of Korean and Asian security and also payment for access to South Korea's economic assistance which is now vital to Moscow. And having paid those fees Moscow is now reaping its benefits. Seoul has begun negotiations with Moscow on a friendship treaty whose terms are as yet unannounced and has agreed to sponsor Moscow's introduction as a member in the Asian-Pacific Economic Council (APEC). The latter is a long-held ambition of Moscow and marks a decisive breach of the formerly closed world of Asian-Pacific economic organizations.²² Thus, Soviet arms control programs are not disinterested suggestions for conflict resolution even if they represent a considerable progress in tone and seriousness from past proposals. Rather they were carefully chosen to advance Soviet interests in the region, mainly the retreat of American strategic forces and power.

But the fact that these proposals to avert conflict are in Moscow's broader interest hardly disqualifies them on those grounds. We may take it for granted that all such positions contain a large dose of self-interested motivation. A second observation is that historically Soviet arms control proposals have been advanced as part of an overall broader security strategy that is both political and military in its content and shape. Again that consideration hardly disqualifies Soviet proposals as such or distinguishes them from other states' proposals. Rather, to assess the goals Moscow has in mind and what would occur should these proposals be realized we need to look at them in the context of overall security policies in Northeast Asia.

First of all, despite Soviet proposals to freeze existing naval and air forces and to degrade both sides' strategic weapons, the fact is that the forthcoming strategic arms treaty's ramifications at sea directly contravene that injunction by allowing both sides a maximum limit of 880 Sea Launched Cruise Missiles (SLCMs). That figure is almost four times the current Soviet capability and could never have been achieved without a crippling naval arms race. Given South Korea's and

Japan's proximity to Soviet naval platforms and the greater number of American strategic targets located near the Pacific coast, as well as the fact that SLCMs are the Soviet Navy's major strike force, this augmentation of Soviet strategic capability for nuclear blackmail in the Pacific is not encouraging.²³

A second disquieting factor is that Soviet commentators appear to have a double standard regarding Western, and specifically American, disarmament compared to their attitude towards the PRC's arms reductions. In this context it should be noted that during 1985-87 the PRC and in 1987-90 the USSR unilaterally reduced the ground forces along their borders, a series of moves that received deserved acclaim. But insofar as Washington's unilateral arms reduction moves in the last few years are concerned, the tone changes. Chufrin observes that some Soviet observers remain suspicious of American disarmament moves because they are unilateral and can be reversed unilaterally as well. This factor is never mentioned regarding PRC moves. And because the American moves are unilateral they do not answer to Soviet interests and concerns. Accordingly, the fact of unilateral American arms control actions proves that comprehensive and formal superpower arms control agreements are necessary, something that Chufrin never mentioned regarding the PRC.²⁴

A third reason for skepticism concerns Soviet-North Korean relations. Chufrin again exaggerated when he said that Moscow had informed North Korea of its course in 1990 and, having not received a proper answer, decided to recognize South Korea so that its policy "*would no longer be held hostage to Pyongyang.*" (my emphasis)²⁵ He exaggerated because more recently Deputy Foreign Minister Rogachev explicitly advised that Moscow supports Kim Il Sung's May 1990 and New Year's Day 1991 proposals for reducing tension, for confidence-building measures and for a confederation in Korea.²⁶ Moscow's foreign propaganda also now support again Pyongyang's proposals for a nuclear free Korea and hides the fact that Kim's 1991 New Year's Day speech represented an apparent step backward, strongly implying the need for immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Korea.²⁷

Soviet military media also strongly support Pyongyang's breaking off talks with the ROK because of the 1991 Team Spirit maneuvers, even though the forces involved were reduced in numbers to lessen tensions.²⁸

The Soviet Policy Debate.

What appears to be the problem is the ambivalent or divided Soviet power struggle over Korean policy, and policy towards Soviet allies in particular. While there is no love lost for Kim Il Sung in Moscow, it does appear that national security policymakers are deeply divided about Korean policy and about the "burden of empire," i.e., support of socialist states and Socialist Internationalism, in general. Chufirin's exclamations to the contrary, Soviet commentators admit that there is a deep division between old and new thinkers regarding Korean policy. The old thinkers support Socialist allies and the structure of confrontation in Northeast Asia, see the West as irrevocably hostile, and therefore recommend a continuing military policy of strength and force acquisition. Ideologically grounded, this approach sees Korea and other regional conflicts as zero-sum games where any concession detracts from Socialist strength and wins no plaudits from an always hostile imperialist bloc.²⁹

The new thinkers claim to see things in terms of facts (so Mikheyev claims), and view North Korea as an obstacle to Soviet policy, especially given the pressing economic need for ties to the ROK's dynamic economy. They exhibit a remarkable confidence that North Korea will fume and threaten but eventually has nowhere to go other than to open towards the world and negotiate with the ROK in a serious fashion. Indeed, one analyst baldly states that if and when Kim Chong-Il, the son and designated successor of Kim Il Sung, comes to power, he will be overthrown within weeks by a combination of the army and the people.³⁰ Naturally, the struggle between these factions holds back fresh Soviet approaches as Moscow gropes to find a military-political solution. Moreover, if the current (early 1991) rightward trend in Soviet politics holds, the military will be strengthened and we can expect to see the kind of backsliding associated with Rogachev's support for the

harder line proposals of January 1991 and support by Moscow for canceling negotiations ostensibly because of Team Spirit. Soviet pressure on Pyongyang to open up its nuclear program, its support for Seoul's and Pyongyang's separate entry to the U.N., and the talks leading to a friendship treaty with Seoul do not invalidate the fact of continuing support for those proposals or for military assistance as mentioned below.

The gap between the two rival Soviet approaches can be summed up in Mikheyev's analyses of the problems each faces. The old thinkers cannot, he says, extricate the USSR from the contradiction of support for North Korean reunification programs on the basis of a confrontation with the South and the visible threat such policy contains to Soviet strategic interests. It also should be noted that their confrontational approach also applies to Japan and would thereby, according to their critics the new thinkers, benefit only the United States and Japan. Sarkisov has argued that only conservatives will benefit from continuing tensions with Japan where both sides perceive each other as "insidious samurais" or "wicked bears." And Kunadze, another reformer, argues that the only ones who win are those Japanese forces who are unwilling to open up to Moscow and the United States "which thereby secures the distancing of the most important country to us (the USSR) from Moscow."³¹

The new thinkers even regard the prospect of a democratic, united, and neutral Korea, even if it subtracts from the world Socialist community, as a net plus because it balances the great powers in the East, especially Japan and China, promotes Moscow's security interests, and neutralizes the American deterrent. It also would promote a lucrative economic association for Moscow which could be used to pressure Japan.³² Other reformers believe that in order for the USSR to dissolve the Tokyo-Seoul-Washington military axis, a principled approach to resolving political and security questions in the region is called for. That approach would then make military partnership with America less profitable and commence the breakdown of this coalition with military and economic benefit to Moscow due to its new access to Japan and South Korea. Though these states are American allies

they are by no means totally dependent upon Washington, and Moscow should lessen tensions to encourage that independence.³³ Or as Vsevolod Ovchinnikov wrote in *Pravda*, due to the dialogues between Seoul and Beijing and of Seoul and Beijing with Moscow,

It is becoming increasingly hard to substantiate the need for the U.S. military presence on the Korean peninsula. Is it possible to speak seriously of a threat from the North, which has half the population of the South and whose economic potential is several times smaller? Whereas it used to be maintained that "two Communist giants" were standing behind Pyongyang's back, the improvement in Seoul's relations with Moscow and Beijing renders that conclusion groundless.³⁴

South Korean analysts are well aware as well that even the new thinking is anti-American and anti-Japanese in its thrust and that its ultimate goals are to undermine the rationale for American military power in Asia with a consequent diplomatic "renversement des alliances" (reversal of alliances). Lee Haeng Goo, a member of the ROK's National Assembly, observed for a Soviet audience that Moscow believes that the purpose of keeping American troops in Korea (and for that matter anywhere in the Asian-Pacific region) is to prevent both Moscow and China from pursuing a more active role in the region.³⁵ Moscow does perceive the American forces in South Korea and Japan as direct threats to its security and the belligerent period of the early 1980s where Moscow saw itself threatened by a warlike encirclement policy of the United States is not forgotten.³⁶

Thus its attempts to solve the problem of American forward deployment in Asia by political means have taken the form of calling for and undertaking disarmament moves vis-a-vis China and the ROK. The apparent primacy of the military and right wing in Soviet policy during 1991 raised the specter that these confident assertions of men like Mikheyev are not going to be tested. Rather, the high rate of military assistance will continue despite all the acrimony currently plaguing Soviet-North Korean relations. In contrast to the reformers, who allegedly place little fear in the American threat or in Chinese initiatives counter to Soviet interests, these groups

supporting Kim Il Sung are following along a script written at least since 1984. Japanese security experts claim that in 1990 alone Moscow offered six top-of-the-line MIG-29 and ten SU-25 fighters similar to the ROK's A-10s. They also claim that not only aircraft and support for ground forces are being transmitted but also support for expansion of nuclear facilities.³⁷ Soviet Deputy Premier Maslyukov announced on January 22, 1991 in Seoul that while Moscow supports expansion of ties with the ROK, it "fully appreciates" Pyongyang's demand that the United States pledge not to use its locally based nuclear weapons against Pyongyang in return for North Korean cessation of its nuclear program or opening up of the country to IAEA inspection (which Japan also wants). Moreover, Moscow will continue to support North Korea with unspecified "defensive weapons" under the terms of the 1961 treaty with Pyongyang.³⁸ Moscow's announcement in April 1991 that it would not provide nuclear assistance to Pyongyang if it did not comply with IAEA inspection procedures adds a new factor to this process, one apparently supported as well by the PRC. What this means for arms transfers of a conventional type will only be fully revealed with the passage of time.

Maslyukov also stressed that the weapons delivered by Moscow in the past are also strictly "defensive weapons."³⁹ These weapons transfers are part of a policy that has increasingly relied upon the transfer of state-of-the-art Soviet equipment as a means of enforcing Moscow's capability of deterring both attacks upon, and apparently from, North Korea. Those arms transfers have also been accompanied by expansion of the naval and air anchorages of the USSR to include North Korean ports, thus giving Moscow enhanced scope for aerial and naval maneuver throughout the range of these weapons systems. Soviet policy, whether a form of deterring Pyongyang through arms supply or something else, also took the shape of a substantial increase in Soviet-North Korean economic interchange. That economic relationship, like the military one, had the net effect of augmenting DPRK dependence upon the planned Soviet economy even as Moscow wrecked that economy at home and insisted at the same time upon North Korean reforms. Thus Moscow's policy

appears to Western observers as paradoxical and inconsistent if not dangerous.⁴⁰

On the one hand Moscow now insists upon payment in convertible currency for its goods and apparently its arms as well, and is loath to continue the annual naval maneuvers with Pyongyang that took place from 1986-90.⁴¹ Polemics between both states occur with increasing openness, vitriol, and regularity and Soviet writers freely attack Pyongyang and Kim's super-Orwellian state. For its part North Korea, according to both Soviet and Japanese press reports, told Shevarnadze in September 1990 that if Moscow recognized Seoul it would reject inspection of its nuclear facilities, feel unbound by any pledges not to create nuclear weapons, support Japan's claims of the Kurile Islands against Moscow, and formally activate the provisions of its 1961 treaty with Moscow that stipulates that Moscow come to DPRK assistance (or vice versa) not only when one partner is attacked, but also when he finds himself "in a condition of war."⁴² Yet, despite this, Soviet spokesmen fully supported DPRK proposals for arms control, continued through the August coup to export high grade weaponry to it, and maintained the burgeoning economic relationship with it.⁴³ Moreover, there has been no word from Moscow, despite foreign press speculation, concerning a renegotiation and amendment of the Pyongyang-Moscow treaty.⁴⁴

The suggestions raised by the reformers and Institutchiki (members of foreign policy institutes) also are not as innocuous as they look. Suggestions calling upon the USSR and the United States to devise joint mediating postures for the two Koreas or to settle Asian-Pacific arms control issues without consideration of regional balances among Japan, China, and the two Koreas also have a mischievous impact. They are intended to divide the Western allies and introduce suspicions of sellouts or superpower condominiums. These proposals also point towards acceptance of the principle that the security of so-called "small states"—the two Koreas—may be negotiated in their absence and over their heads by the superpowers. Thus Soviet suggestions like Vadim Medvedev's, that Moscow mediate a denuclearization and

disarmament of the Pacific in talks with Japan and the United States and that it had already discussed denuclearizing the Korean peninsula with Washington, triggered a strong response by South Korea's Foreign Minister.

Choe Ho-Chung dismissed the idea that the surrounding powers could guarantee Korean security by themselves.⁴⁵ Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the author of the Soviet article spelling out Pyongyang's threats to Moscow in September 1990 rightly commented that Moscow's position approaches absurdity. It supports Pyongyang's conventional arms program and the nuclear weapons program while it avidly pursues maximum economic-political relations with Seoul and is subjected to harsh polemics from Pyongyang. The latter, for its part, shows no sign of changing its violent longings for unification. Therefore the author calls for an "excessive dose of skepticism" about the initial hints of a thaw in the situation in the Korean peninsula and an early end to the cold war there.⁴⁶ Accordingly, actual Soviet policy casts great doubt upon the viability of Soviet arms control and CBM proposals and corroborates Donald Zagoria's observations that:

Moreover, many of Gorbachev's arms controls proposals are so patently one-sided that they inspire the belief that they must be largely intended for propaganda. The proposal to establish nuclear-free zones in Korea, Southeast Asia, and the South Pacific, where naval forces are stationed, while omitting any mention of the Sea of Okhotsk, the Kamchatka Peninsula, and the Soviet Union's own Maritime Province, where nuclear forces are stationed, is one such example.⁴⁷

Thus despite claims to the contrary about the new thinking having a universal expanding sum content, in Asia the fact remains that Soviet security proposals are one-sided in their effects. They aim to replace the U.S.-led security system, not with a multipolar one but with one of Soviet authorship stacked against both the United States and Japan. The fact that Soviet officials admit that their security proposals for Asia, outlined in the Vladivostok and Khabarovsk speeches of 1986 and 1988 and more recently in Gorbachev's April 17, 1991 speech to the Japanese Diet and ex-Foreign Minister Shevardnadze's speech to the Vladivostok Conference in September 1990, derive

directly from the Helsinki process, which is irrelevant to Asian concerns, also cannot inspire confidence.⁴⁸

Some Soviet analysts appear to understand that these proposals cannot really serve as a basis for genuine progress beyond opening the door to Seoul. Aleksandr' Bovin, a usually authoritative commentator, recently observed that Soviet Asian policy has been hurt by its addiction to a party propaganda approach over political and diplomatic ones. Great words and statements are not followed by actions but rather by "modest and bashful" commitments and a failure to take serious practical steps to realize declarations of intent. That is the main reason for suspicion about Soviet concepts of Asian collective security. Bovin is not alone in his views. R. Sh. Aliev, something of a maverick Soviet Japanologist, made a similar observation in *Acta Slavica Iaponica* in 1989-90.⁴⁹ Jonathan Haslam wrote in the same journal that,

In theory Gorbachev's consciousness of Russia's technological backwardness and his recognition of the urgent need for economic reform at home have led to a novel emphasis on the importance of economics in Moscow's assessment of international relations. Yet those domestic reforms above all require peace on all fronts abroad and it is this that has produced a foreign policy curiously at odds with the immediate needs of economic reconstruction. The priority abroad has hitherto been not that of winning over foreign investors—and Japanese investment could make all the difference to the future of the Soviet Far East— but that of disarming Russia's adversaries. Where priorities have to be made, immediate requirements give way to the overriding primacy of the security imperative. In practice Moscow's foreign policy—despite the primacy of *Perestroika* at home—still assumes bombs are more important than bonds; that those with sufficient military capability to threaten the homeland merit greater concessions than those unable to do so.⁵⁰

Hence the move to eject foreign troops from South Korea and defuse the war danger there—the greatest one in all Asia where superpower interests are concerned.

Bovin also observes, as have others before him, that the test of Soviet intentions in Asia is its own domestic behavior.⁵¹ Failure to reform the economy, massive arrears to Asian

businessmen and persisting macro-economic disequilibria, among which only the most elemental is the nonconvertible currency, could not be resolved by the neo-Stalinist policies of xenophobia and confiscatory policies followed by covert inflation that were in the ascendancy in Moscow during early 1991.⁵² Such policies only reinforce precisely those sectors most interested in pursuing a military based policy in support of Kim Il Sung and the 1980s buildup in Asia. A clear domestic linkage between domestic and foreign policy had emerged and support for Third World allies appears to have been a major plank of the reactionaries, something discernible from Maslyukav's remarks above.

Bovin's argument here corresponds to Haslam's and explains why policy towards Japan did not break free of the constraints of conservatives. While they saw Japan as a threat in the future or more likely to the degree that it associates itself with American security and defense policies, they counted on the explosion of American-Japanese rivalry to bring Tokyo to Moscow. Concessions to South Korea were part of that process that sets the ROK and a potentially united peninsula against Japan and forces it to approach Moscow.⁵³ Domestic reform was not so urgent in their view and certainly Moscow did not have to make concessions to Tokyo. But in Korea the danger of war and the irrationality of Pyongyang, coupled with uncertainty regarding its future policies, are good reasons for the current rapprochement with Seoul. In Korea, as opposed to Japan, there were grounds for convergence of reformers' and conservatives' policies, even if their ultimate vector sharply diverged as they moved away from the Korean peninsula.

Soviet Military Strategy and the Two Koreas.

The Soviet arms control proposals remained one-sided and insufficient to the real task of disarmament and peace on the Korean peninsula. They ultimately attested to a policy that elevated unilateral military-political considerations over economic interests and the international "balance of interests" It remains necessary to inquire as to the role arms control proposals played and might still play in overall Soviet security strategy when they are examined in the context of ongoing

military programs. From a geostrategic standpoint the Korean peninsula is vital to both Soviet naval and air forces as a gateway either into Soviet air and naval bases in Asia or from them into the Pacific. The presence of strong ROK and U.S. forces, including perhaps tactical nuclear weapons and SSBNs, as well as similar situations in Japan confront Moscow with grave threats should it try to threaten either Japan or the ROK.

By the same token the advent of naval missile technology and of air delivered weapons has, in conjunction with Soviet naval doctrine, inescapably forced Moscow into a threatening posture versus those areas. Since naval and naval air platforms can deliver missiles from thousands of miles away with great accuracy and Soviet doctrine at present identifies the SLCM threat in particular as the gravest threat it faces, Moscow perceives a necessity to construct counters or deterrents against such platforms. Secondly, Soviet doctrine and force building programs increasingly stress that without air superiority, mobility at sea and control of the sea are inconceivable. For Moscow to defend its submarine and surface vessel bastions in the Pacific it must construct a far-flung air and air defense network combining both powerful shore and deck-based aircraft and anti-ship missiles, either from the air, submarine, or surface vessels. Soviet naval construction programs have not slackened and stress this combination of submarines, carriers, and steadily upgraded land-based and sea-based aircraft along with carriers (what Moscow calls carriers for its fleet are more like heavy cruisers with carrier-based air forces). All these programs point to a strategic decision, that in the Far East, Moscow must consistently strive to expand its defense envelope, a policy which inescapably entails creating a naval, air, and air defense umbrella over both Korean states and Japan.⁵⁴

Doctrinally such a program evokes the idea of a limited theater of command or control of the sea which had emerged in Soviet thinking by 1946 and, according to some analysts, remains operative until now.⁵⁵ This notion entails command or control of a portion of the naval or oceanic theater of strategic military operations (*Teatr' Voennvkh Deistvii* in Russian) where

the strategic operations will occur and also securing maximum freedom of movement to conduct the component parts of this operation. The greater the threat from sea-based platforms, including naval air, becomes, the more investment must be made against this threat and the more the strategic role of the naval, air defense, and air assets involved grows.

In this connection two other features must also be kept in mind. First, many recent military leaders were Far Easterners, veterans of the Far Eastern TVD, even if they were army men as is traditionally the case. It is quite likely that they were not inclined to minimize the military dimensions of security policy throughout the region but had quite the opposite viewpoint. The second point is that despite the cutbacks in Soviet military spending, high level statements by both former Defense Minister Marshal Yazov, and Chief of Staff Moiseyev, indicated the navy's relative exemption from those cuts. In his speech to the Royal United Services Institute in 1989, Yazov stressed that priority is being given, for example, to anti-submarine and anti-air assets.⁵⁶ Traditionally these are submarines and both shore and sea-based aircraft that the Soviets labelled offensive Western programs. The fact that these platforms would now be Soviet ones does not change this fact.⁵⁷

The political analogue of this effort to expand the reach of Soviet military power in naval and air forces is the effort to break up the threat, that is the so-called Tokyo-Seoul-Washington axis. One way is to stimulate a political process that leads to American demilitarization while Soviet assets at home remain relatively untouched. The new Soviet Asian policy is tailored precisely to this objective. It seeks to insert Moscow into Asian security processes in any conceivable way either by multilateral or bilateral accords while attempting to exploit Japanese-Korean tensions with each other and with the United States and to maintain influence over both Koreas or a united if neutral Korea.⁵⁸ At the same time the prior and concurrent Sino-Soviet normalization, coupled with China's burgeoning trade with Seoul and disinclination to see conflict in Korea, constrains both Pyongyang and Beijing in their mutual relationship. The military benefit of the tie with China was also quite significant. Any potential Asian horizontal

escalation or encirclement undertaken by the West needed the Chinese land forces and perhaps bases for air and naval assets to threaten Soviet Asian assets seriously. With China gone as a threat the Soviets now have strategic depth for their naval and air bases on the Pacific coast. Secondly, their military ties with Pyongyang offer opportunities for expanding their systems' range of activity and safety from a receding American forward deployment.

Should the united and neutral Korea envisioned by Mikheev come to pass, it would necessarily entail the departure of U.S. forces. And, by virtue of its burgeoning trade with Moscow, that state would be loath to offend the USSR. It would also be a counter to both Japan and China in economics, politics, and security policy. It would not be difficult for Moscow always to have at least one partner in Asia from among those three states and a judicious diplomacy could easily manage the level of rivalry among them. On the other hand the continuation of the split on the Korean peninsula, a so-called German solution of mutual recognition, mutual membership in the U.N. and a diminution of tensions between the two Koreas would bring about reduction of the American presence. That situation would also give Moscow a "droit de regard" over the peninsula's affairs by virtue of its trade connections to both Koreas and its control over North Korean military development. In either case Moscow hopes to stimulate a process which satisfies its traditional aims that the Korean peninsula not be a hostile base against Russia and in some sense be receptive to its influence.⁵⁹

Thus while reformers' and traditional military opinions divide in many ways, neither provides a sound basis for going beyond recognition of Seoul to satisfactory arms control and security processes in the Asia-Pacific region. For the moment, until Moscow decides its internal and external course more decisively, caution is warranted. The gains to date for the West from the new policy are impressive and real but they do not mitigate the fact that behind the rhetoric of collective security and new thinking lies a sophisticated pursuit of self-interest and an unflagging military modernization. Whether Moscow adopts old or new thinking in its security policies generally and

to the two Korean states in particular, its perceived self-interest before August 1991 was still antagonistic to the West (Japan, ROK, United States). That perception of interest was based on a desire to eject American power from the region and on the simplistic view that American power in the area is directed solely against the USSR.

By the same token, the optimistic assumptions of the new thinkers concerning North Korea's supposed lack of alternatives remain unproven. At least some South Korean analysts can make a convincing argument that the ineptitude of Japan's approach to better relations with Pyongyang that was triggered by Moscow's moves toward Seoul could complicate the search for peace rather than abet it.⁶⁰ Secondly, many ROK analyses of the North Korean negotiating position see little or nothing in them that is new. These proposals still aim to unhinge the ROK government and disarm it and remove the U.S. troops while opening up South Korea to North Korean political influence.⁶¹

All of the foregoing therefore inclines one to caution in assessing Soviet proposals and bona fides as a mediator for the Korean conflict. Indeed, as we now know, all of Soviet security policy was in a state of complete rethinking as a desperate political struggle raged in Moscow over the future direction of the USSR. Ultimately what will decide Soviet foreign policy is the course of domestic policy there. The earlier reversion to neo-Stalinist and xenophobic economic policy in the Soviet Union not only imperiled the future of the economic ties to South Korea, Japan, and ASEAN in which so much has been invested, but it also has ominous portent for Soviet foreign and military policy in the region.

The most alarming recent trend has been one that celebrated various authoritarian models of economic development from which Moscow may choose. These models ranged from Pinochet's Chile, to the Generals' South Korea, the PRC, or somewhat less alarming, Singapore or postwar Japan. Though little noted, this is a dangerous trend because each model's advocates also then advocated a priority relationship with that country. In other words, advocates of the Sino-Soviet entente were mainly in the military as are those

supporting Pyongyang. Thus one analyst wrote that he had the impression that the North Korean-Soviet alliance was restricted to the sphere of the General Staffs of each country.⁶² Another Soviet analyst was even more explicit about Sino-Soviet relations. He observes that:

It must be observed that among a section of military and party figures in both countries there are those who support a sharp increase in collaboration. Certain Soviet officials openly approved the Chinese Army's actions to 'suppress the counterrevolutionary rebellion' in 1989. To the commanders of the Chinese Armed Forces, which were set up according to Soviet principles and equipped with weapons copied from Soviet models, it may appear only natural to make a 'great leap forward' in modernization on the basis of very up-to-date equipment and technology from the USSR, sold, moreover, at very accessible prices. In both capitals, people still survive who advocate a return to the Stalin or Mao Zedong model of orthodox socialism and hope for ideological, political, and other assistance from their great neighbor in realizing their dream. They find equally unacceptable the necessary reforms, which they see as the 'intrigues of world imperialism,' and are prepared once again to shut themselves off from the outside world with 'curtains.'⁶³

That example indicates the linkages between such lobbies both internationally and with regard to their countries' full domestic and foreign policy or security policy agendas. The advent of such lobbies that link domestic and foreign policy stances in the Asia-Pacific region would have greatly added to the volatility and uncertainty of future Soviet or Chinese policies and to the possibility of a primarily military-driven and overtly anti-Western policy in contrast to the more subtle policies of 1986-90. Such an outcome was and perhaps in the future is by no means excluded. For instance, Bovin recently observed that Gorbachev could not resolve the issue of the Northern Territories and unfreeze Soviet-Japanese relationships because his hands were "literally tied and bound. Whatever the president wanted to do it was clear that he could not do it."⁶⁴ Undoubtedly domestic constraints will play a considerable role in future Soviet policies, and as long as the domestic situation there is uncertain so too will foreign policies be liable to sudden shifts or abortive initiatives. Thus while change is the law of life for Moscow and Pyongyang, caution

and skepticism are still warranted because progressive change in both capitals that really meets Korea's and Asia's needs is not yet an ordained law. For now such change is only a hope, and an unproven one at that.

Postscript: The August Coup and After.

The abortive party, KGB, and military coup of August 19-21, 1991 and the ensuing revolution now under way in the former USSR underscores the tight connection between the domestic struggle for power there and overall Soviet security policy in both Europe and Asia. Since the coup the military, KGB, and party apparatus's powers have been substantially curtailed and the erstwhile friends of regimes like North Korea's are now in disgrace or under arrest. It is, of course, still too soon to determine the full outlines of the Asiatic strategy of the new regime that is taking shape. But certain tendencies are making themselves felt. China has grown intensely fearful of democratic trends in its own state, even more than before, and is acting increasingly as if it expects a cold war with the West, a part of which now includes the new Russian authorities and policy.⁶⁵ Soviet authorities are talking of resolving outstanding issues with Japan such as the Kurile Islands in order to gain financial and technical assistance from Japan. In North Korea's case, the reaction has been muted but it clearly will come to light soon enough. Pyongyang has lost its "friends at court" in the USSR. It will be impelled even more to seek better relations with both Beijing, which is now quite amicable with Seoul, and with non-Communist states. But Beijing is almost certain to advise North Korea to refrain from nuclear or conventional sabre-rattling and get on with controlled reform as it did. The inception of serious negotiations with Japan (which cannot be too eager to see a reunited Korea as competitor and rival) signal such an interest on Pyongyang's part. Similarly there is little doubt that the South Korean ties to the Russian state should, for the foreseeable future, deepen both in economic and political terms.

If military tensions in Asia were the last thing the Gorbachev government wanted, then the new leadership is even more interested in liquidating potential seats of conflict there. We can

expect a further demilitarization of Soviet foreign policy driven by both economic and political considerations. It is more than likely that the Maritime Provinces will finally be opened up to economic intercourse with both Koreas, China, Japan, Canada, and the United States. Military obstruction was the key barrier to this in the past. We can also expect that the new Russian diplomacy will lean harder on denuclearizing Northeast Asia, in particular North Korea's nuclear program which now threatens everyone in the area and obstructs any U.S. withdrawal from the South. Beijing and Seoul are now also too closely tied by trade for China to give North Korea continuing blank checks against future reform. And the iron logic of political and generational succession will force Pyongyang in the direction of substantial change. Thus there are grounds for optimism in the area provided that the Russian, Chinese, and North Korean situations stabilize economically and politically in a democratic direction, that China's attempted crackdown and retreat to a new cold war fails but not so violently as to lead to civil war, and that American withdrawal from the defense of Japan and South Korea is not precipitate but progresses in accordance with the development of trends to peace and democracy in Asia. None of these benevolent possibilities are necessarily foreordained, but the prospects opened up by the new Russian revolution cannot but give more hope than was the case earlier when the reactionaries were still fighting for control there. In Asia as in Europe the domestic political configuration drove Soviet security perspectives in the past. Hopefully in the future the same gravitational pull will exist but now in a democratic direction for both Russia and the remaining Communist states of Asia.

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