

The Seventh Workers Party of Korea Congress: A Russian Interpretation of a North Korean Phenomenon

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Judging by South Korean President Park Geun-hye's 13 June 2016 statement, Seoul has decided to cut off dialogue with North Korea, demanding that Pyongyang first end its nuclear programme.

As is well known, South Korea severed all communication channels with the North and closed the last collaborative economic development – a joint industrial zone in Kaesong – after North Korea conducted its fourth nuclear test and satellite launch in January-February 2016.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning the conciliatory overtures made towards Seoul at the 7th Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) held in May, which included the holding of high-level talks between military authorities and then the convening of an inter-Korean meeting in August to discuss reunification.

The North Korean government also extended an invitation to dialogue to Washington. In particular, it included an idea highly-valued by experts of a so-called package deal in the manner of a 'moratorium for a moratorium': Pyongyang would stop conducting nuclear tests for a certain period of time and the US would stop its annual large-scale joint military exercises with South Korea close to the demilitarised zone or at least move them to an area further away from North Korea.

Unfortunately, however, these proposals by North Korea were rejected just like all of the country's previous ones. The argument that every peaceful step by Pyongyang is just propaganda intended to camouflage an imminent 'act of provocation' that needs to be prepared for in advance without losing time studying the diplomatic signals emanating from the banks of the Taedong River is an already familiar explanation for this kind of approach.

Categorically refusing to enter into a dialogue with North Korea proves only one thing – that Washington, Seoul and their allies have an alternative agenda aimed at regime change in North Korea by imposing the toughest sanctions, putting pressure on the country and deepening its isolation.

This also explains Seoul's negative attitude to Pyongyang's invitation to resume discussions on the prospect of Korean reunification at a meeting on 15 August that will coincide with the 71st anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule. This clearly shows the fundamental differences between the two sides regarding how to reunite their divided nation.

The current government in Seoul is trying to reunite Korea by swallowing up the North and is trying to make this happen in the near future.

Pyongyang is suggesting a different way, however – reunification by forming a ‘Confederal Republic of Koryo.’ This plan, developed during the reign of Kim Il-sung, was confirmed in the overtures made towards South Korea in May-June 2016.

The essence of North Korea’s idea is the formation of a confederal republic that will allow for the existence of two social systems and two governments within a single nation and a single state. The formula supposes that the two parts of Korea will initially co-exist within the context of a common state formation and then gradually draw closer.

North Korea believes that the two Korean sides should not blindly copy the experience of other countries, but should form an entity that corresponds to the historical experience of Koreans without asking for the permission of external forces to reunify.

All of Pyongyang’s peace initiatives were formulated at the latest party congress. In our opinion, this event was worthy of much more attention than was given to it by the world’s media.

The 7th Congress of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK) took place on 6-9 May 2016 after a 36-year hiatus. It opened a new stage in the development of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. Among its most important achievements, the following are worth highlighting.

The congress marked the end of the transitional period for the establishment of Kim Jong-un’s leadership, confirming both its continuity with regard to the commitments of the previous government and the viability of new objectives and policies.

As is well known, Kim Jong-il, the father of North Korea’s current leader, who led the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea from 1994 to 2011, did not conduct party congresses – he adhered to an army priority policy, which was regarded as the main driving force of society. This was due to the need to overcome the severe economic crisis of the middle to late 1990s.

Kim Jong-un, however, considered it possible to return to normal political practices by restoring the balance of the branches of government, which would also strengthen the role of the party.

The new leader came to power with the idea that «everyone should do their own job: the army should defend the state; the party should provide political leadership; and the cabinet of ministers should ensure economic development».

The party congress held after a 36-year hiatus confirmed that he has succeeded in carrying out his plan and returning to the principles of leadership practised by his grandfather, the founder of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Kim Il-sung.

The policy aimed at the parallel development of the economy and nuclear arms build-up was also reinforced at the 7th Congress of the WPK.

One of the hobby horses of Western critics regarding this approach is the argument that it is

impossible to combine these two objectives. They say that a government developing nuclear weapons is unable to successfully implement a programme of economic development and improve living standards.

The development of North Korea shows otherwise.

Even with the increasingly stringent sanctions, GDP continues to grow at a moderate but steady rate, more and more economic innovations are being implemented, which are also ensuring a seemingly never-ending construction boom, primarily in the capital, and there has also been an increase in harvests in recent years, which is reducing the food shortage considerably.

The party congress identified the transfer of all sectors of the economy to a scientific and intellectual level as a priority. Eyewitnesses testify that this is not just a slogan, and the successful practice of increasingly computerising national industry has had a tangible, material effect in recent years.

These days, even some US experts recognise the uniqueness of the North Korean phenomenon, the essence of which is that despite international sanctions, Kim Jong-un is successfully managing to both develop his country's nuclear military potential and achieve a certain amount of economic growth, which is improving the lives of large segments of the North Korean population.

As a result, North Korea is not only surviving without help from the South, but is not even in any desperate need for a dialogue with it.

The 7th Congress of the WPK has also confirmed the seriousness of the North Korean government's approach to doing business in the nuclear sector, including a commitment to the requirements of nuclear non-proliferation.

Note that the expectations of many observers, who believed that a fifth nuclear test would be carried out as a 'gift' for the party congress, have not been met.

The alarmist interpretations of Pyongyang's statements on the right of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to a preventive nuclear strike, which were made at the time of a military and political crisis in March and April during large-scale American and South Korean military exercises, have also been left hanging in midair.

It was firmly stated from the podium of the party congress that North Korea has no intention of using nuclear weapons first.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea today is a country that is confident in its own abilities and in the possibility of further developing the social and economic system that exists within it.

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