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RUSSIA CAN PROFIT FROM NORTH KOREA'S MISSILE TESTS

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One of the people most hated by Vladimir Lenin, leader of the Bolsheviks, was the German social democrat Eduard Bernstein, who proclaimed that the ultimate aim of socialism is nothing, but the movement is everything. In Soviet schools we had to study Lenins fierce criticism of that view, which he saw as revisionist.

Lenins concept was the opposite to achieve a goal as fast as possible, whatever the cost. Russia has long since ditched Leninism, and adopted the Bersteinian approach that process is more important than the result, which is shown by Moscows approach to North Korea. Ironically, Pyongyang still officially follows Lenins teaching that the goal justifies any means.

The North Korean nuclear missile crisis has no easy solution, but managing it is both possible and necessary. And if Russia does this skilfully it will strengthen its position in Asia-Pacific and mark another step away from US hegemony in international affairs. Moscow sees this, and it explains some controversial statements by the countrys officials.

Russia supported the UN Security Councils resolution to toughen sanctions on North Korea (followed by the latest missile launch, fired towards Japan), but Vasily Nebenzya, Russias permanent representative to the UN, warned that no further new sanctions □□□□□□□□ help avert the deepening threat from the Korean peninsula.

Mikhail Ulyanov, director of the Russian foreign ministrys department for non-proliferation and arms control, unequivocally rejected Pyongyangs conduct, but emphasised: in the absence of truly reliable international legal guarantees for its national security, North Korea relies on nuclear missile weapons, treating them primarily as a deterrent tool.

President Vladimir Putin earlier this month condemned the missile tests as provocative, but called sanctions useless and ineffective. North Korea would rather eat grass than abandon their [nuclear weapons] programme unless they feel secure, he said.

The Kremlin understands the North Korean psychology, since Russias leaders have historically also felt besieged. For North Korea, it is not about bargaining, but survival Kim Jong Un knows the fate of Iraqs Saddam Hussein and Libyas Muammer Gaddafi and sees nuclear missiles as his life insurance.

For years North Korea was not a priority for Moscow, but that has changed domestically and internationally. Moscow hopes to use the political pivot to Asia, which was accelerated by the Ukraine crisis, as a socio-economic driver of Russias under-populated and under-developed far east. The countrys traditional way of boosting development is not to stimulate the investment climate, but to create geopolitical dynamism and make itself an important strategic player as happened in Syria in the wake of military advances.

A recent study by Rand on Russian strategy in the Middle East concluded: The most visible elements of Russian strategy its multi-faceted diplomatic relations or its recent interventionist trend are likely to be superseded by longer-term economic, energy, and arms deals. These have the potential to cement Russian involvement, generate real returns, and shape the relations of both Russia and regional actors.

Russia is uniquely positioned in east Asia. It has workable relations with all the countries involved, with the possible exception of the US. China is an important partner, relations with South Korea are pretty close, there is still the echo of special relations with North Korea and ties with Japan are strengthening.

Settlement of the North Korean issue would bring new opportunities for the Russian economy, because promising energy and transportation projects (such as the gas pipeline to South Korea and the extension of the Trans-Siberian route) are blocked by the isolation of North Korea and the risk of escalating regional conflict.

Decades of six-party talks have failed to stop Pyongyangs nuclear ambitions and new approaches are needed. Russia and China could probably offer a more ambitious agenda than the freeze for freeze presented at the UN in July North Korea freezes its missile tests and the US and South Korea impose a moratorium on large-scale military exercises. One possibility is a joint initiative by Russia and China (not on behalf of the US), offering North Korea security guarantees and inclusion in major regional economic projects in return for the end of provocations and a verifiable freeze of

the nuclear missile programme.

That would put serious responsibility on Moscow and Beijing, including the obligation to punish North Korea for non-compliance with the agreement. It might also be a face-saver for Pyongyang, being presented as a good deal between friends rather than a surrender to an enemy. But Washington would see this as a reward for unacceptable behaviour and resist it.

In Russia and China there is a widespread belief that North Koreas provocations play into the USs hands because they give a pretext for American military build-up in east Asia (where the prime target is China) and multibillion-dollar arms deals with regional partners such as South Korea and Japan.

Since Russian interests in the region are not likely to be quickly advanced, it also suits Moscow to prolong the status quo. With a military move against North Korea still unthinkable due to the risks for US allies, Russias bargaining position with the major players is strengthened.,

With a gradual stepping up of UN sanctions, Russia and China can increase pressure on Pyongyang without boxing it into a corner, keeping the options open for dialogue. And the longer the situation lasts, the more obvious the USs failure to settle the crisis becomes.

Mr Kim, who keeps provoking everybody with his missile launches, shares Lenins commitment to zero compromise. In Russia, exactly 100 years ago, Bernsteins revisionism was overthrown by Lenins zeal. The repercussions for the country were fatal, but Lenins aim was achieved. Now the keys are in Mr Kims hands.

Kaynak/Source: