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American Factor in Inter-Korean Relations in 2012–2023

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Abstract. The relevance of the research topic is due to the active development of the U.S.-South Korean relations and their impact on inter-Korean relations. The role of the United States in the foreign policy of the Republic of Korea is great which not only limits it in developing of its own potential due to the direct dependence on decisions and actions but also hinders the normalization of relations between the two Koreas. The purpose of the research is to examine the dynamics of relations in the triangle “ROK (Republic of Korea) — DPRK (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea) — U.S.”. The main methods of the study include analyzing the events in the triangle “ROK — DPRK — the U.S.” as well as the texts of UNSC (United Nations Security Council) resolutions on nuclear non-proliferation on the Korean peninsula. The study concludes that despite South Korea’s attempts to stabilize relations with its northern neighbor, its pro-American course in foreign policy has prevented it from making significant concessions. For today, the ROK’s foreign policy is aimed at deepening cooperation with the US and its security partners in the region. Therefore no warming in relations between the two Koreas is expected in the near future.

Keywords: Republic of Korea, ROK, USA, DPRK, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the U.S.-South Korean relations, nuclear threat, inter-Korean relations, DPRK nuclear program

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Американский фактор в межкорейских отношениях в 2012–2023 гг.

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Аннотация. Актуальность темы исследования обусловлена повышением влияния США на корейском полуострове путем усиления американо-южнокорейского альянса и его влиянием на межкорейские отношения. Роль Соединенных Штатов Америки во внешней политике Республики Корея велика, что не только ограничивает ее в развитии собственного потенциала из-за прямой зависимости от решений и действий Вашингтона, но и препятствует нормализации отношений между двумя Кореями. Целью исследования является изучение динамики отношений в треугольнике РК — КНДР — США. Основные методы исследования составляют анализ событий в треугольнике РК — КНДР — США, а также текстов резолюций Совета Безопасности ООН относительно вопросов ядерного нераспространения на Корейском полуострове. По итогам исследования был сделан вывод, что невзирая на попытки Южной Кореи стабилизировать отношения с северным соседом, ее проамериканский курс во внешней политике не дает пойти на значительные уступки. На сегодняшний день внешняя политика РК направлена на углубление сотрудничества с США и их партнерами по безопасности в регионе, в связи с чем в ближайшее время не ожидается потепления в отношениях между двумя Кореями.

Ключевые слова: Республика Корея, США, КНДР, американо-южнокорейские отношения, ядерная угроза, межкорейские отношения, ядерная программа КНДР

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Introduction

The historically uneasy relationship between the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are now experiencing a period of new tension which is primarily due to the active involvement of the United States in the inter-Korean dialog. Nowadays South Korea is a politically and economically active state both in the Indo-Pacific region and in the international arena. However, the country's foreign policy is strongly influenced by the US.

The basis of ROK — the U.S. relations is the fight against the DPRK and the nuclear threat posed by it. On the issues of nuclear non-proliferation on the Korean Peninsula and building inter-Korean dialog, the US influence on decision-making in the ROK is particularly strong. One of the main tools used by the United States to consolidate and further maintain its influence in the region is its military presence. At the same time, it is also an obstacle to the normalization of inter-Korean dialogue as well as the complete denuclearization of the entire Peninsula.

The role of the United States in the foreign policy of the Republic of Korea is great which not only limits it in the development of its own potential due to the direct dependence on Washington's decisions and actions but also hinders the normalization of relations between the two Koreas. The purpose of the article is to study the dynamics of relations in the triangle "ROK-DPRK-the U.S."

Dynamics of inter-Korean relations and the U.S. factor from 2012 to 2017

In the period from 2012 to 2018 one can trace the dramatic changes in relations between North and South Korea due to both international tensions and the strengthening of the U.S. — ROK alliance as well as the election of new leaders in Seoul and Washington who revised their policies toward the DPRK. The period 2012–2017 became one of the tensest in the triangle "ROK-DPRK-the U.S." in the 21st century because of the presidency of Park Geun-hye. The new president chose the fight against North Korea's nuclear program as the main direction of the Republic of Korea's foreign policy. An important point in the North Korean vector of the policy of the eleventh South Korean president was defined as the unification of the two Koreas through the common efforts together with the United States and China [1. P. 25]. The toughening of the North Korean policy of the ROK coincided with the strict stance of B. Obama's administration which undertook a sanctions approach as a response to the provocative missile launches of the DPRK as well as strengthened support for South Korea and interaction between the partners in the region.

However, the DPRK's position on the issue was to solve the problem bilaterally, without involving external actors. Pyongyang was ready to engage in dialogue only provided that South Korea would stop copying the U.S. hostile policy toward its northern neighbor.

Relations were complicated by the amendment of the DPRK Constitution in April 2012 due to the death of Kim Jong Il on December 17, 2011. In its preamble the document noted that the Songun ("Army First") policy had transformed the Democratic People's Republic of Korea into a nuclear power building up its own military strength and opening a broad path to building a prosperous nation. North Korea thus formalized its nuclear status for the first time [2. P. 1].

On December 12, 2012, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Kim Il Sung's birthday, the DPRK launched the artificial satellite "Kwangmenson-3". After that, the United States, the Republic of Korea and Japan requested the UN Security Council to hold a meeting on North Korea's ballistic missile launch. As a result, on January 22, 2013, the UNSC Resolution S/RES/2087 (2013) was adopted which tightened measures against the DPRK on arms proliferation as well as imposed sanctions on North Korean officials and companies involved in the DPRK's nuclear program (Table 1).

Table 1

UNSC vote on the Korean issue in 2012–2023

Date	Resolution	Initiator and voting results	Reasons for the adoption of the resolution	Content of the resolution
1	2	3	4	5
12.06.2012	S/RES/2050	USA Yes: 15 No: 0	Development of the DPRK's nuclear program	expansion of the UN mandate to monitor nuclear, chemical and biological weapons possessed by the DPRK; extension of the mandate of the Group of Experts until July 12, 2013.
22.01.2013	S/RES/2087	USA Yes: 15 No: 0	Launch of the Kwangmyongsong-3 space satellite by the DPRK on December 12, 2012. Kwangmyongsong-3 space satellite launched by the DPRK in honor of the 100th anniversary of Kim Il Sung's birth.	expansion of measures concerning the rights of Member States to seize and destroy materials related to arms proliferation. expanding measures against individuals who are also involved in the DPRK's nuclear program; call for the increased vigilance against individuals and entities acting on behalf of DPRK's financial institutions.
07.03.2013	S/RES/2094	Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Canada, Morocco, Netherlands, ROK, Rwanda, UK, USA, Togo, Philippines, France and Japan Yes: 15 No: 0	The DPRK's nuclear test on February 12, 2013.	condemning the DPRK's nuclear tests and demanding a return to the NPT (Non-Proliferation Treaty); imposing the targeted financial sanctions against individuals and entities involved in the DPRK's nuclear program; expansion of the list of prohibited items related to nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles and others; ban on the supply of luxury goods to the DPRK; inspection of cargoes sent from/to the DPRK.
02.03.2016	S/RES/2270	Albania, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Palau, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, ROC, Senegal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somalia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, UK, USA, Uruguay and Vanuatu Yes: 15 No: 0	DPRK's announcement of its first successful hydrogen bomb test on January 6, 2016. Launch of the Kwangmyongsong-4 space satellite by the DPRK on February 7, 2016. Kwangmyongsong-4 space satellite launched by the DPRK on February 7, 2016	a ban on activities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea related to technical cooperation with other countries in the field of ballistic missile technology launches; an embargo on arms and related materials, financial transactions, technical training and advisory assistance; imposing the new inspection requirements on cargo and sea vessels traveling from or to the DPRK; expansion of the economic sanctions including blocking funds of DPRK government agencies and its Labor Party related to the illegal programs and activities; imposition of sanctions (embargoes on coal, minerals and fuel); banning the admission of trainers, consultants and other official DPRK personnel for military, paramilitary and police training purposes; inclusion of 16 new DPRK individuals and 12 organizations in the sanctions list.

Continuation of Table 1

1	2	3	4	5
30.11. 2016	S/RES/2321	Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, ROC, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, UK, USA and Uruguay Yes: 15 No: 0	DPRK conducts its fifth nuclear test at the Punggye-ri test site on September 9, 2016	inclusion of 11 individuals and 10 DPRK organizations on the sanctions list; introduction of a ban on items specified in the updated list; expanding the requirements for inspection of cargo, hand luggage and baggage of persons arriving in or leaving the DPRK; banning the provision of insurance services for vessels controlled or operated by the DPRK; banning new helicopters and vessels to the DPRK; revision and expansion of sectoral sanctions (coal, minerals and fuel); expanding the list of prohibited luxury goods with the addition of new items; imposition of requirements to reduce the number of North Korean personnel in the diplomatic missions and consular offices of member countries; introduction of the requirement to suspend scientific and technical cooperation with the DPRK; banning the DPRK from supplying, selling or transferring monuments and prohibiting member states from acquiring these items; closing all branches, representative offices and bank accounts in the DPRK.
02.06. 2017	S/RES/2356	USA Yes: 15 No: 0	DPRK's fifth nuclear test at the Punggye-ri test site on September 9, 2016.	inclusion in the sanctions list of 14 individuals and 4 organizations of the DPRK who took part in the nuclear test at the Punggye-ri test site; a ban on entering ports and chartering DPRK-flagged vessels.
05.08. 2017	S/RES/2371	USA Yes: 15 No: 0	DPRK launches of Hwansong-12 ballistic missiles on April 4, 15 and 28	imposing a complete ban on the purchase of coal, iron and iron ore, seafood etc. from the DPRK; ban on visiting ports and chartering DPRK-flagged vessels; banning the hiring of new North Korean workers who are a source of export earnings from abroad; expansion of the financial sanctions; a ban on the deployment and use of chemical weapons; calling on the DPRK to accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention. inclusion of 9 individuals and 4 organizations of the DPRK in the sanctions list.

End of table 1

1	2	3	4	5
11.09.2017	S/RES/2375	USA Yes: 15 No: 0	DPRK's sixth nuclear test on September 3, 2017 (thermonuclear bomb)	inclusion of 1 individual and 3 DPRK organizations in the sanctions list; complete ban on exports of all types of condensates and gas condensate liquids; imposition of restrictions on all oil refined products; imposition of restrictions on DPRK supplies of crude oil; ban on the sale of textile products to the DPRK; banning the issuance of new work permits to DPRK citizens; expansion of the financial sanctions.
22.12.2017	S/RES/2397	USA Yes: 15 No: 0	The launch on November 28, 2017. DPRK launch of the Hwasong-15 intercontinental ballistic missile	strengthening restrictions on supplies from the DPRK of all refined petroleum products and other goods; expanding the scope of sectoral sanctions; imposing a ban on supplies of all types of industrial equipment to the DPRK etc. tightening restrictions on issuing work permits to DPRK nationals including repatriation of all DPRK nationals earning income in member countries as well as all DPRK attaches engaged in state control of labor protection; tightening maritime inspections to combat illegal exports of coal and other prohibited goods from the DPRK; strengthening the provision prohibiting the provision of insurance or reinsurance services for DPRK vessels and deregistration of any vessels involved in illegal activities.
26.05.2022	S/2022/431 (not accepted)	USA Yes: 13 No: Russia, China	DPRK's first successful launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile on March 24, 2022	inclusion of 1 individual in the sanctions list and freezing of assets of 3 DPRK organizations; embargo on exports from the DPRK of mineral fuels, petroleum and their distillation products; bituminous substances; mineral waxes as well as watches and parts thereof; an embargo on the supply, sale or transfer to the DPRK of all types of tobacco and industrial tobacco substitutes; a total ban on the purchase of information and communication technology services from the DPRK.
23.03.2023	S/RES/2680	USA Yes: 15 No: 0	Development of the DPRK's nuclear program	extension of the mandate of the Group of Experts until April 30, 2024.

Source: Compiled by the authors on the basis of UNSC resolutions.

On January 6, 2016, the DPRK conducted an underground nuclear test of a hydrogen rocket at the test site “Punggye-ri”. On February 7 of the same year, North Korea launched the space satellite “Kwangmyongsong-4”. These actions raised international concern, after that a meeting of the UN Security Council was convened. With the approval of all five permanent members and ten non-permanent members of the UNSC, a resolution imposing new sanctions against the DPRK was unanimously adopted [3. P. 104]. In accordance with Resolution S/RES/2270 (2016), a new procedure for inspection of cargo and sea vessels traveling from or to the state was introduced against the North Korean state as well as a ban on arms trade, freezing of assets related to the North Korean government, embargo on coal, minerals and fuel etc. [4].

Tensions between the two Koreas began to rise after pronouncement of the DPRK’s death sentence against former Korean President Park Geun-hye and South Korean intelligence chief Lee Byung-ho. The sentence was handed down for allegedly plotting an assassination attempt on Kim Jong Un in 2017. According to a joint statement by the Ministry of State Security and the DPRK Central Prosecutor’s Office, the North Korean government demanded the transfer of Park Geun-hye and Lee Byung-ho in accordance with international laws regarding “state terrorism” committed against the top leadership [5. P. 304].

China and Russia attempted to ease tensions between the ROK, the US and the DPRK. The two states proposed a roadmap later called “Dual suspension” to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. According to this plan, North Korea was to suspend nuclear tests and the U.S. and South Korea were to phase out military exercises near the North Korean border. The first step was to ease tensions on the inter-Korean border. The next stage was to organize direct talks between the DPRK and the United States, and then move on to the multilateral negotiations aimed at ensuring peace and security in Northeast Asia [6].

North Korea announced its readiness to fulfill its obligations under the proposed program: in 2018 it froze its nuclear program and blew up the only the test site “Punggye-ri”. The DPRK government also stated that after the closure of this test site there were no more such facilities left on its territory. The elimination of the test site was supposed to be a demonstration of the peaceful intentions but there was no response from the U.S.–ROK alliance [7. P. 133].

The election of D. Trump as a president of the United States and Moon Jae-in as president of the Republic of Korea in 2017 was conceived with wariness by North Korea. This reaction was due to the fact that at the beginning of his presidency the new South Korean leader declared his agreement with the US position on the inter-Korean issue. The policy of both states toward

the DPRK implied a combination of two components — deterrence and engagement, namely, exerting pressure and threatening sanctions, on the one hand, and engaging the DPRK in dialog, on the other [8. P. 191]. However, there were also differences, primarily in the rhetoric of the leaders. While Trump declared his readiness for the decisive actions (up to the military), Moon Jae-in called for peace talks emphasizing that there would be no war on the Korean Peninsula (Table 2).

Table 2

The positions of the Republic of Korea and the United States on key issues on the Korean Peninsula: commonalities and differences

	Republic of Korea	USA
Denuclearization of North Korea	Yes	Yes
Sanctions against the DPRK	Yes	Yes
Military action	No	Possibly
Termination of the joint RK-U.S. military exercises	No	No

Source: Kim Chong Woo, Samir Puri. Beyond the 2017 North Korea Crisis: Deterrence and Containment // JSTOR. 2017. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep08093> (accessed: 21.12.2023).

The policy of D. Trump has also undergone changes in comparison with the stance of B. Obama’s administration. Even though the general line remained the same (expansion of military cooperation with allies in the region and large-scale sanctions), however, D. Trump also developed his own approach of trying to build personal ties with the North Korean leader in order to bring trust to bilateral relations. However, this approach did not work as the U.S. position on the Korean nuclear program did not change. D. Trump continued to insist on the complete denuclearization as the first step on the part of the DPRK which would be followed by normalization of relations and lifting of sanctions.

One of the destabilizing factors at that time was the joint U.S.–South Korean military exercises which the North perceives as preparation for war [9. P. 304]. Thus, in December 2017, against the backdrop of North Korean missile tests, the United States and South Korea conducted the largest military exercise code named “Vigilant ACE”. The exercise was conducted at the request of the ROK president to demonstrate the ability of U.S. and South Korean forces to respond to “the provocative actions” in the form of North Korean ballistic missile launches [10]. Thus, the period 2012–2017 became quite tense in inter-Korean relations which ended in a crisis after that the DPRK tested several medium-

range ballistic missiles in May 2017 which demonstrated the potential ability to hit the US mainland, Washington and Pyongyang turned to the mutual threats. It was only the common interest in peace on the Korean Peninsula that forced the sides to make concessions.

Post-crisis stabilization of relations and a new round of tensions in 2022

Despite D. Trump's rather harsh statements, Moon Jae-in still made attempts to establish a dialog between the North and the South. Thus, in December 2017, the ROK president suggested that the United States should postpone military exercises in connection with the Pyeongchang Olympics scheduled for 2018. This step not only eased tensions between the two countries but also demonstrated South Korea's readiness for dialog. It is important to note that the U.S. accepted the offer and no joint military exercises were conducted during the 2018 Olympics.

Significant shifts toward improved relations between the USA, ROK and DPRK began to occur in 2018 when the United States' policy toward North Korea underwent a change which subsequently affected the interaction between the two Koreas. During the trilateral summit the U.S. — ROK — DPRK took place between 2018 and 2019, an agreement was reached to establish a relationship as long as requirements were met [11. P. 293]. However, the U.S. stated that it agreed to interact on this issue only after the complete nuclear disarmament of the DPRK. In turn, North Korea considered its own steps to freeze its nuclear program and destroy the test site "Punggye-ri" sufficient to continue dialogue with the United States and lift sanctions [12. P. 59].

Despite provocations made by the DPRK, South Korea has taken various measures to improve relations with the DPRK. Seoul continued to provide humanitarian aid and tried to restore exchanges between the Korean citizens even after Pyongyang cut off two inter-Korean communication channels and conducted several ballistic missile tests in 2017 [13]. Another achievement in normalizing North-South dialogue was Moon Jae-in's inclusion of the DPRK in the 2018 Olympic Games.

These steps have brought results. On April 27, 2018, the leaders of the ROK and the DPRK held a summit that resulted in the signing of the Panmunjom Declaration. The two sides agreed to take joint steps to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula and continue to establish dialogue on the various inter-Korean issues. The declaration envisioned the principle of national self-determination of the two Koreas, an end to the war as well as the establishment of a multilateral agreement with the participation of the United States and China [14].

On June 12, 2018, the first historic meeting between the leaders of the United States and the DPRK was held in Singapore mediated by the Republic of Korea during

which North Korea committed to denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula in exchange for the security guarantees from the United States. In addition, on September 20, 2018, the ROK and the DPRK signed the “Pyongyang September Joint Declaration” covering all aspects of relations between the two Koreas. Importantly, the declaration included a paragraph indicating the DPRK’s willingness to make concessions to resolve the North-South issue. For example, Pyongyang promised to close its nuclear facilities in Yongbyon [15].

On February 27–28, 2019, a second meeting was held between Kim Jong-un and D. Trump in Hanoi. Both heads of state had pinned their hopes on this summit. For the DPRK it was an opportunity to lift many sanctions, for the U.S. — to strengthen its position on the Peninsula at a time of active rapprochement and cooperation between the two Koreas. At the very beginning of the conversation between the two leaders it was mentioned about the need to create an agency that would be responsible for the issues of interaction between the states as well as there was information about the beginning of the preparation of the Hanoi Declaration. However, this meeting between the DPRK and the United States did not meet expectations and ended prematurely without signing any agreement [16. P. 3–4].

The U.S. side stated that the summit was ended early due to the North Korean side’s demand to lift all sanctions which the U.S. was not ready to do at that time. It is important to note that in his speech, D. Trump noted the readiness of North Korea to denuclearize most of the territories that the U.S. demanded but the American side was not ready to give up all sanctions for the sake of it. At the same time, the president noted that the negotiations were fruitful and at the moment the U.S. will reflect on its further actions regarding the inter-Korean issue [17]. In turn, North Korea said that Kim Jong-un did not ask for a complete lifting of sanctions but only offered a partial lifting [18].

Despite the fact that the Hanoi summit did not lead to the global changes in relations, it is considered one of the diplomatic and conciliatory steps of the two states showing readiness for dialog. It was also announced that new talks would be held soon. Thus, during 2020 the ROK and the US were preparing to hold another negotiation with the DPRK but the process was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

After the 2021 U.S. election Joe Biden’s administration outlined its approach to the North Korean issue, combining diplomacy and containment. However, the election of Yun Seok-yol in 2022 did not further improve North-South relations. There was an inclination to follow D. Biden’s course in relations with the DPRK and to deepen relations with the USA and Japan [19. P. 4]. Its position is reflected in the presented South Korean “Bold Initiative”. This document outlined the readiness to provide food, technical, medical and other assistance to the DPRK (except for the security guarantees) in exchange for a complete cessation of nuclear weapons development. In addition, the ROK

was ready to mediate the normalization of relations between the United States and the DPRK [20].

However, the DPRK government reacted negatively to this initiative noting that it is “childish and extremely stupid” and repeats the previous failed programs [21. P. 425]. Deep distrust of the current South Korean administration coupled with dissatisfaction with the joint U.S.–South Korean exercises as well as suspicions of Seoul’s involvement in the deliberate spread of the COVID-19 epidemic in the DPRK put an end to the negotiations on complete disarmament [22. P. 104].

In September 2022, North Korea published a document titled “Law on the DPRK’s Nuclear Armed Forces Strategy Act” in which it recognized once again its status as a nuclear power and refused to denuclearize. According to this Law, Pyongyang retains the right to use nuclear weapons in response to the external aggression [23]. In addition, North Korea launched a record number of missiles in 2022 after nearly two years of quiescence. In December 2022, there was an incident that strained relations between the countries when in response to the U.S.–South Korean exercises North Korea launched the drones into the territory of the ROK after which Seoul took to the skies with fighter jets and attack helicopters. During the interception one of the South Korean KA-1 attack aircraft crashed. South Korean authorities blamed the North for the incident. Yun Seok-yol said that the DPRK posed no threat to them and stressed the need to retaliate in case of the repeated aggression by its neighbor [24].

In 2023, no active action was taken to resolve the issue of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and stabilize inter-Korean relations. In his inaugural speech President of the Republic of Korea Yun Seok-yol said that peaceful action will be taken to resolve the problem on the Korean Peninsula and ensure security around the world. It was also announced that he was ready to engage other nations, especially the United States (as the main military partner) [25].

At the same time, the actions of South Korea and the United States raise doubts about the desire of the two states to stabilize the situation in the region. For example, in January 2023, the ROK–US talks were held on the organization of the joint exercises with the participation of American nuclear forces. A directorate for countering nuclear weapons and other WMD (Weapon of Mass Destruction) was also established which will be responsible for countering threats from the DPRK [26. P. 7]. In November 2023, the Republic of Korea and the United States adopted an updated a deterrence strategy for the DPRK called “Adapted Deterrence Strategy 2023” which included measures to counter the threat posed by the northern neighbor. In addition, Yun Seok-yol stated that the ROK is considering the deployment of another state’s tactical nuclear weapons on its territory in the near term as well as ready to build its own in case the situation on the Korean Peninsula worsens because of the North Korean nuclear program after a sharp increase in missile tests in early

2022. Besides this, Yun Seok-yol has publicly advocated a preemptive strike against Pyongyang in case there are signs that the DPRK's missiles are aimed at the South [27].

The DPRK, in turn, declared its readiness to activate missile launches into the Pacific Ocean at any time, despite the fact that these launches are quite rare. Throughout 2023, North Korea has repeatedly carried out missile launches, underwater drone tests and other weapons which has been a constant source of concern for the United States, the ROK, Japan and other states. For example, between January and September alone, missiles such as Hwasal-2, Hwasong-15, Hwasong-17, Hwasong-18 etc. were repeatedly launched [28. P. 35–36].

It is also important to note the increase in the number of the ROK military exercises conducted jointly with the U.S. and Japan in 2023. The following exercises were conducted: Air Force exercises with a strategic bomber and joint exercises in the Sea of Japan (ROK, the USA, Japan), “Freedom Shield” command post exercise based on computer simulation, Ssangyong maritime landing exercise, live-fire exercises, trilateral naval exercises with an aircraft carrier (ROK, the USA, Japan), the first armament tests of the fighter jet “KF-21”, trilateral maritime exercises (ROK, the USA, Japan), military and civil defense exercise “Hwaran”, training simulation of the reflection of threats from space, air force exercises involving about 110 aircraft in Gwangju, joint military exercises in honor of the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Korea and the 70th anniversary of the ROK–US alliance, joint command and staff exercises on nuclear strike scenarios with the U.S., the second aviation exercise with a U.S. strategic bomber etc. [29. P. 55–64].

It should be noted that Yun Seok-yol's presidency is still in progress but one can already see dramatic changes in the inter-Korean policy compared to the previous president of South Korea (Moon Jae-in). In many ways, these changes are related to the strengthening of cooperation with the U.S. and its partners in the region.

Conclusion

Summarizing the results, it should be noted that the American factor played a major role in the relations between the DPRK and the ROK during the period 2012–2023. During Donald Trump's presidency there was a sharp deterioration in relations between the two Koreas, ending with the missile crisis of 2017–2018. However, thanks to Moon Jae-in's efforts, the inter-Korean dialogue gradually normalized which contributed to the partial restoration of cooperation in the various fields. However, there was no cardinal improvement due to the fact that the two sides were still unable to agree on each other's security guarantees. Inter-

Korean relations were influenced to a greater extent by the U.S. policy and the U.S. government's refusal to recognize the steps taken by the North Korean side as meaningful.

The changes in the ROK policy since Yun Seok-yol came to power in 2022 have rapidly inflamed the trilateral relations between the ROK, North Korea and the United States. The events of 2022–2023 confirm the fact that inter-Korean relations are not expected to improve under the current South Korean president. On the contrary, the lack of dialog and South Korea's constant military exercises with the U.S. and Japan only exacerbate them. The presence of the U.S. factor in North-South relations at the moment does not contribute to the stabilization of inter-Korean dialogue and hinders the resolution of the issue of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

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