

## How will Russia under Putin affect the Future of Northeast Asia?

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### Interviewees

Jae Nam Ko

On March 4 2012, Vladimir Putin was elected as the next president of Russia with 63.75% of the vote, despite protests from opposition parties and anti-Putin civic groups. Professor Jae Nam Ko of Korea National Diplomacy Academy discussed on the implications of the election result for Russia's foreign policy and the impact on Northeast Asia for the future. He also considered the responses the South Korean government should undertake. The following is a summary of the main policy recommendations from the interview.

**Q1: What do you expect from the new Putin administration's foreign policy and the approach it will take toward Northeast Asia in the future?**

**A1-1: "It is highly likely that Putin's promotion of a "strong Russia" and the "protection of national interests" was rhetoric for the election."**

- In the run-up to the election, Vladimir Putin had made bold statements that he will pursue an independent role for Russia on the international stage based on "strong national power" and "national interests." In specifically criticizing Western intervention in the Arab Spring, he placed emphasis on strengthening Russia's military power in order to ensure the sovereignty of countries around the world as well as to maintain Russia's position as a powerful country in the international community.
- On the other hand, the independent policy for a "strong Russia" that Putin stressed during the presidential election is generally political rhetoric. It is expected that Moscow will actually maintain its current practical diplomatic line. Russia will continue to emphasize cooperation rather than conflict in order to promote continued economic development, construction of a multipolar international order, strengthening the integration of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and improving Russia's role in the international community.

**A1-2: "Russia will unlikely change its policies toward East Asia, but will be watching China's rise closely over the next decade."**

- Russia will continue with its even policy toward North and South Korea. At the same time, Moscow will seek policies to expand its influence on the Korean Peninsula while maintaining that it will not recognize North Korea's status as a nuclear state.

This product presents a policy-oriented summary of the Smart Q&A.

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- Russia will continue to cooperate with the United States regarding international issues such as nuclear proliferation, terrorism, and drug-trafficking, however the issues of the Missile Defense and intervention in the Middle East will still be areas of conflict.
- While there will be no significant changes to Russia's policy toward China, it is expected that Putin will still devote efforts toward deepening and expanding bilateral and international strategic cooperation in order to improve its "Strategic Cooperative Partnership" with China in the short term. Depending on China's rise, Russia could also pursue a role as a balancer in the medium to long-term. Over the next decade, the nature of China's rise and the way in which the triangular relationship among the United States, China, and Russia will evolve should be observed carefully.
- Resolving the territorial disputes with Japan over the Kuril Islands will not be easy. However, the Putin administration is expected to actively engage in economic cooperation with Japan to develop the Russian Far East and Siberia regions.

**Q2: What policy measures should be taken by the South Korean government in response?**

**A2-1: "Seoul should look now to enhancing the substance of its 'Strategic Cooperative Partnership' with Russia"**

- In September 2008, the South Korea-Russia bilateral relationship was elevated from "Comprehensive Partnership Based on Mutual Trust" to "Strategic Cooperative Partnership." Since then, bilateral relations have improved dramatically through frequent summit meetings and non-governmental exchanges, including the Korea-Russia Forum. Seoul should continue to strongly promote such cooperative programs with Moscow to support this elevated status further.

**A2-2: "South Korea should also encourage Russia's constructive role on the Korean Peninsula, particularly in regards to the North Korean nuclear issue."**

- It will be crucial for South Korea to encourage for a constructive role from Russia to ensure peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, especially regarding the North Korean nuclear issue. In this context, South Korea should also strengthen its political and diplomatic effort to support the early resumption of the Six-Party Talks and the revitalization of the Working Group on a Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism (NEAPSM), which has Russia as its chair.
- The Trans-Korea Gas Pipeline project proposed in 2011 should be one area of focus for Korea-Russia relations including seeking North Korea's active participation. This is more than an energy issue. The gas pipeline project can be an opportunity to deepen North-South Korean economic dependence and improve the political and diplomatic relationship of the two Koreas. If the pipeline project is successfully carried out, South Korea will then have the momentum to pursue other programs such as the linking the Trans Korean Railway to the Trans-Siberian Railway, expand the electrical grid connection, and green growth cooperation.

**A2-3: "South Korea should consider active participation in Russia's economic development of the Russian Far East and Siberian regions."**

- A unified Korea in the future will require a bridgehead to enter into the continent. In view of this reality, South Korea will have to utilize both of its governmental and civil efforts in building and expanding economic bases in Russia. This will mean that South Korea will need to actively participate in Russia's economic development of the Russian Far East and Siberia regions.
- Finally, South Korea should share its experiences in holding major international events with Russia in order to assist the Kremlin in successfully hosting the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in Vladivostok, which is expected to be held in September 2012. Seoul should also support Moscow in its efforts to strengthen its economic integration with other Asia-Pacific countries through the active promotion of improved cooperation during this event.■

## **About the Interviewee**

### **Jae Nam Ko**

Jae Nam Ko is a professor of Development of European and African Studies at Korea National Diplomacy Academy (KNDA). Professor Ko received his Ph. D in Political Science from the University of Missouri in the United States.