



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

Putin and Kim on their way to dangerous destabilisation of security in the Pacific



The visit of the Russian Minister of Defence Sergei Shoigu to Pyongyang last July was a strategic visit regarding military and security issues. This was confirmed by the meeting between Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un, which has taken place only a month and a half later. These 2 countries, which top of the list of the world's most-sanctioned nations, have been trying to use that isolation to their mutual advantage through strategic security arrangements. It remains only to formulate the response of the "rest of the world" to the more than evident formation of a solid and aggressive alliance between the two renegade regimes. The meeting between Kim and Putin will mark the culmination of a well-established military alliance that has grown stronger in the context of the Russian problem due to its protracted and draining offensive war against Ukraine.

The final stamp on the arms deal

Shoigu's mission to North Korea last July was no doubt aimed at strengthening the supply channels for weapons and ammunition that Russia has been using without reservations on the Ukrainian front, and Pyongyang has almost an abundance of it. Last November, the US National Security Council published the findings of the US intelligence services stating that North Korea was "covertly supplying Russia's war in Ukraine with a significant number of artillery shells". This arrangement has therefore been in place for a long time despite denials from both Moscow and Pyongyang. In this respect, Shoigu's mission to North Korea last July could have only been aimed at solidifying and expanding this arrangement. Given that high-level talks between the 2 countries immediately followed, this objective had been accomplished. Their purpose is to add a final political stamp to a military-trade deal, which is already under way, confirming a powerful combat alliance.

Russia is in a weak negotiating position

Russia entered this deal out of sheer necessity. There are many different estimates of how much artillery ammunition the Russian army uses daily on the Ukrainian front, but the amount never falls below 5,000 pieces. By all accounts, the condition of its warehouses is poor, given the large consumption, frequent attacks by the Ukrainian army on ammunition stocks, and particularly the long-term poor maintenance of obsolete ammunition, a large part of which is unusable today. Given the protracted nature of the war in Ukraine, Russia is in an almost impossible position regarding essential military supplies. Isolation and sanctions have forced it to turn to North Korea, with stockpiles of artillery ammunition estimated at tens of millions. North Korea could be "the best, and may be the only option" for Russia, as Jon Finer, U.S. President Joe Biden's Principal Deputy National Security Adviser, said last Sunday. However, the discussions between Russia and North Korea, while having evident interests for Russia, raise the question of what Pyongyang receives in return, and how this alliance affects the general situation in the Pacific region, where North Korea is the biggest exporter of risk and instability. The necessity that pressures Russia to do business with North Korea puts it in a not very favourable negotiating position and gives scope for the North Korean dictator to deliver demands, which he was previously unable to do.

Kim will be asking for more than food and oil

There is no precise information on what Russia used to pay for North Korean weapons, primarily ammunition. It is anticipated that energy and food delivery will take the lead in this arrangement, but Moscow might also pay for some purchases in hard currency. These are also North Korea's priorities, given the lack of oil, gas and food due to one of the most severe crises. The UN estimates that the country can only provide enough food for around three-quarters of its 26 million citizens to ensure their survival. But being received by Putin as a customer with no other options

enables Kim Jong Un to demand more than just meeting the basic needs of his nation. The authoritarian doctrine of "Military First" obliges him to do so. It subordinates everything to the country's militarisation, even the basic needs of its population. It would not be a surprise if the Putin-Kim negotiations result in a considerably broader Russian military supply to North Korea, including the advanced military technologies that Kim has been frantically pursuing to maintain his militarised country's viability. Experts point out that it might be advanced nuclear technologies, followed by submarines and missile systems - everything Pyongyang yearns for to make threats against its neighbours (South Korea and Japan), and particularly the US, actually founded. In this respect, the meeting between Putin and Kim is a "very significant development if it goes forward. Russia has the military technology that Kim wants for his illegal satellite launch and nuclear weapons delivery programs", Leif-Eric Easley, professor of international studies at Ewha Womans University in Seoul, told CNN.

Pyongyang's requests for advanced systems and military technologies, China's priority of maintaining the regional geopolitical status quo would be significantly jeopardised.

What will be China's response?

Such a potential arrangement between Russia and North Korea, a deeply isolated state, would have enormous consequences for the otherwise fragile security situation and balance in the Pacific region. This would make it dramatically worse and make Pyongyang an even bigger security threat than it already is. Moscow has no inhibitions about entering into such arrangements because they meet Russia's existential interest, specifically operations in Ukraine, for which it lacks resources. But North Korea desires advanced military technologies to overcome its constant failures in demonstrating its military power to the states in the region it considers enemies, particularly the US. In such an environment, China, as a partner of Russia and North Korea, is being forced openly to use its authority against Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions. While not restraining North Korea in its military provocations regarding the US and its Pacific allies, China does not want a nuclear North Korea. If Russia started to comply with