

# Brothers in Arms or Friends with Benefits? Russia-DPRK Strategic Engagement and Implications for Northeast Asia

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2023 marked the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of what Pyongyang believes to be its victory in the Korean War. The North Korean war effort then was actively supported by the Soviet Union. Throughout the Cold War confrontation in the Asia Pacific region, Pyongyang remained one of the Soviet Union's closest allies.



In the 1990s and 2000s successive Russian governments supported international sanctions imposed on the DPRK in response to its nuclear-missile program. One of the latest rounds of sanctions was approved by President Vladimir Putin in October 2017.

The war in Ukraine has acted as a trigger for the reanimation of the frozen strategic ties between the nations. Kim Jong Un's regime was one of the very few that openly sided with Moscow when it invaded Ukraine in February 2022. In 2023, Russia's Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu led a large Russian defence delegation to Pyongyang. In September that year Kim Jong Un held his second meeting with Putin and toured the Russian Far East.

Despite ambitions to increase economic ties, the Russia-DPRK rapprochement is likely to prioritise political, security and defence cooperation, to counteract US plans to strengthen the trilateral security and defence arrangement with Seoul and Tokyo alongside the AUKUS agreement.

What will Putin's forecast visit to the DPRK, which may occur as early as May, reveal about how far the two regimes are prepared to go in rebuilding strategic ties?



**Dr Alexey D. Muraviev** is Associate Professor of National Security and Strategic Studies at Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia. He is the founder and Director of the Strategic Flashlight forum on national security and strategy at Curtin. He is head of the strategic affairs program at [Curtin's Korea Research and Engagement Centre of Western Australia](#). Alexey is the former Head of Department of Social Sciences and Security Studies at Curtin. Between 2016 and 2021, Alexey was academic lead of Curtin defence strategic initiative. He was also a non-residential fellow at Sea Power Centre Australia, the Royal Australian Navy; inaugural scholar-in residence at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute; and national judge, Department of Defence Eureka Prize for Outstanding Science in Safeguarding Australia (2019 to 2021). Among his latest publications are 'Strategic Reality Check: The Current State and Prospects of Russia-China Deepening Defence Cooperation', *Australian Journal of Defence and Strategic Studies*, 3 (1), 2021; *Russia in Howard M. Hensel (ed), Security Dynamics in the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula*, London and New York, Routledge, 2023; 'Battle Reading the Russian Pacific Fleet 2023–2030', *Sea Power Paper*, Canberra: Sea Power Centre Australia, 2023; *Russia and the South China Sea in Howard M. Hensel (ed), Security Dynamics in the South China Sea*, London and New York, Routledge, 2024 (forthcoming). He is a member of the International Editorial and Advisory Board, *The Australian Journal of Defence and Strategic Studies*, Australian Department of Defence; member of the Australian Member Committee, Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region (AU-CSCAP); and member of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London.

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