

Putin Calls for Closer Ties Between Russia and North Korea

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russia's President Vladimir Putin attends a meeting with his core support group, the People's Front in Moscow on Nov. 18, 2014.

Russian President Vladimir Putin called Wednesday for deeper ties with North Korea to improve regional security, a day after holding talks with a personal envoy of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Senior North Korean officials visit Moscow infrequently but the isolated country is trying to counter a UN resolution urging Pyongyang's referral to the International Criminal Court for alleged crimes against humanity.

Russia is also one of five countries involved in talks with North Korea on its nuclear program. The others are South Korea, China, the U.S. and Japan.

The Kremlin gave no details of Putin's meeting on Tuesday with Choe Ryong Hae, a close aide

to Kim and a senior official from the ruling Workers' Party who is a seven-day trip to Russia.

But receiving the credentials of North Korea's new ambassador to Russia, Putin said during a televised Kremlin ceremony: "We maintain friendly relations with one of our neighbors, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

"A further deepening of political ties and trade and economic cooperation is definitely in the interests of the peoples of both countries and ensuring regional stability and security," he said.

A Russian Foreign Ministry source told the Interfax news agency this week that the visit would include discussion of bilateral ties, economic developments and North Korea's nuclear program but made no mention of the UN resolution.

"The subject of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is constantly present on the agenda of our dialogue with North Korea," the source said. "Moreover, progress in this field is a mandatory condition of lifting the sanctions against the country which naturally impose big limits on our bilateral relations."

On Tuesday, a UN Assembly committee dealing with human rights passed a resolution calling for the UN Security Council to consider referring North Korea to the International Criminal Court for alleged crimes against humanity.

The vote followed a UN Commission of Inquiry report published in February detailing wide-ranging abuses in North Korea, including prison camps, systematic torture, starvation and killings comparable to Nazi-era atrocities.

North Korea has dismissed the UN move as part of a U.S.-led plot to destroy its political system.

Diplomats say North Korea ally China would be likely to use its Security Council veto to knock down an ICC referral and that Russia would probably support Beijing's stance.

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