

# Coming Full Circle

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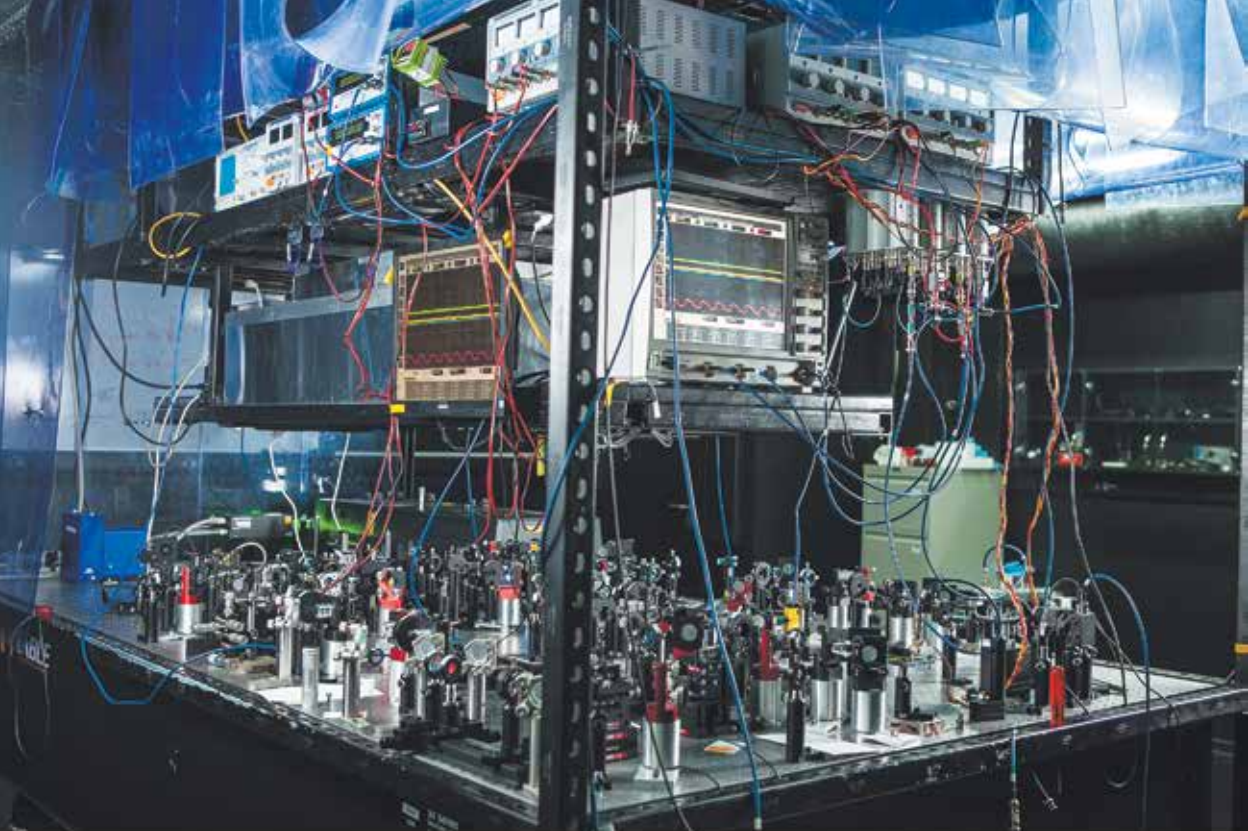
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The world is changing right before our eyes. At first glance, it might seem that the international system of the Cold War era is reemerging. However, the new socio-political context is so fundamentally different that the outward similarity is deceptive.

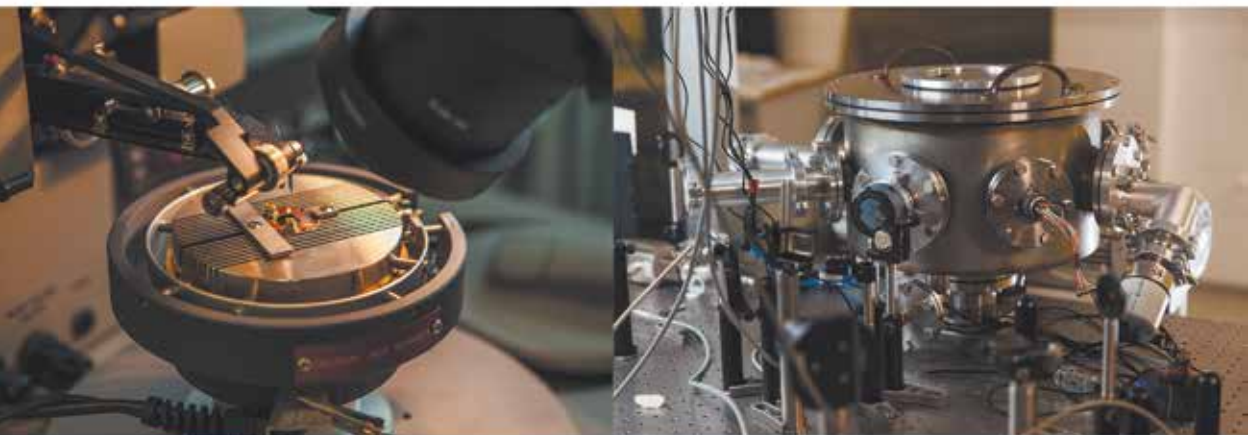
Vladimir Putin's visit to North Korea, in June 2024, is illustrative. The numerous (often quite ideological) reactions, where pro or contra, saw it as a return to the Soviet era, especially since the Comprehensive Strategic

Partnership Treaty between Russia and North Korea revives many provisions from that era. The reaction is quite understandable: the world is deeply polarized, and the specifics of Pyongyang's political system can make anything maximally ideologically-charged. Yet, appearances aside, there are two points that are worth mentioning, and they concern more than just Russia-DPRK relations.

Firstly, the steps taken are entirely pragmatic. Each side has its own specific interests, and their



**Quantum technologies** embodied in microchips and lasers have already changed our world at least once. Now they are about to change it again by controlling matter and light at the level of individual particles. **The second quantum revolution** will be new materials and ultra-secure communications, superlative accuracy in measurement and efficiency in calculation. **The Russian Quantum Center** is steadily riding on the crest of this new technological wave.



satisfaction is facilitated by the agreements. Active hostilities in Ukraine impose military needs on Russia, and a labor shortage has only increased Russia's interest in attracting North Korean workers. Pyongyang, which has long been in severe isolation (including self-imposed), will receive long-unavailable financial and political benefits. One can, of course, suggest that Moscow and Pyongyang will be so happy with their newfound partnership that they will set joint goals regarding, for example, the Korean Peninsula—or the region in general, where confrontation is also intensifying. But this is no more than an unsupported hypothesis. The two countries are unlikely to endanger their fundamental interests by burdening such a practically important relationship with vague inflated ambitions.

Secondly, much more than the Cold War (military-ideological confrontation), the post-Cold War era (the liberal world order) has caused world politics to diverge from the historical norm in which states are driven primarily by material interests, and only secondarily by ideological and ethical imperatives. Post-Cold War globalization (economic, but also political and ideological) gave birth to the notion of international relations' dependence on values, most vividly manifested in the U.S.'s

concept of 'rogue states' created in 1990s.

Crucially, this term applies not only to countries at war with the U.S. (for them, any epithets are permissible), but to increasing number of countries that diverge from U.S.-defined standards of conduct. The list of such countries has varied, but North Korea has always been at the top of it as the most flagrant violator of the established 'norms.' The very concept of 'rogue state' implies some sort of high society that is off-limits to anyone acting inappropriately, and its apogee came in 2022, when the U.S. tried to define the world's largest country as a rogue state.

Although most countries rejected the concept, the U.S.'s total dominance has ensured it notable influence on international affairs since 1990 (when the changed balance of power saw its first major crisis: Iraq's invasion of Kuwait). It is no coincidence that international sanctions, rarely imposed since the UN's creation, began to rapidly multiply after the end of the Cold War and the loss of balance in the international system. These sanctions generally reflected the U.S.'s moralizing approach to conflict resolution: designate the guilty party and—instead of seeking (often complex and ambiguous) ways to resolve the disagreement—punish the declared perpetrator by

all means possible. The effectiveness of this approach is illustrated by the current state of all the conflicts that were to be settled, including the North Korean nuclear issue.

The latest changes in the international arena, including the new Russia-DPRK relationship,

are returning us to pre-liberal international practice. The first Cold War's victors have so far been unsuccessful in their attempts to regain dominance. It is up to everyone to decide whether this is good or bad. But the world has come full circle.