

CHAPTER 2

Russia's Regional Security Role

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AFTER the cold war, as the trend toward a multipolar world continues throughout the world, the security environment in Asia Pacific is changing dynamically. Peace and development are the main trends in this region, even after the financial crisis. The great powers including the United States, Japan, China, and Russia, as well as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), are adjusting their strategic relations, enhancing confidence-building measures, and pursuing mechanisms of cooperative security. Changes in the security environment of Asia Pacific since the cold war can be identified as follows.

First, the regional bipolar political pattern is giving way to multilateral interaction and coordination. In the post-cold war era, relations between the United States, Russia, China, Japan, and ASEAN have replaced the strategic triangle of the United States, China, and the former Soviet Union. The five major powers have their own very important interests in this region and as relations between them are improving, a strategic equilibrium is emerging between them which gives shape to the security structure of Asia Pacific. None of them can handle regional security affairs alone, so the relative balance and interdependence of the five major powers benefit regional stability and security.

Second, economic competition and development instead of military confrontation have become the major feature of relations in the region. Although some countries are presently experiencing great financial

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hardship, the regional economy of Asia Pacific has generated interdependence between the various countries, resulting in less differences and more compromises. Geo-economics is increasingly more important than geopolitics, and the security situation is enhanced by the development of the regional economy.

Third, all kinds of mechanisms for maintaining regional or bilateral security are being pursued or being improved. Many countries are establishing security mechanisms to increase transparency and understanding, and to reduce unnecessary suspicion and misunderstanding. Such security mechanisms incorporate governmental, nongovernmental, and semigovernmental arrangements. The last two are also called "track two" or "second channel" mechanisms and examples include the Asia Pacific Roundtable conference; the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue; comprehensive security regimes such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which regards security as a multidimensional concept that includes economic, political, military, environmental, and other factors; and confidence-building agreements such as the multilateral agreement between Russia, China, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan.

Fourth, the five major powers have not formed a stable relationship structure. Relations between them are characterized by cooperation as well as competition, and coordination as well as mutual restraint. The attitudes of China, Russia, Japan, and ASEAN toward the United States are especially complex and sensitive. None of the four wants the United States to dominate the security affairs of the region, but they have to admit that their respective bilateral relations with the United States are the most important of their foreign relations.

Fifth, although the security situation in Asia Pacific is presently characterized by lessening tensions and increasing stability, some old conflicts have yet to be thoroughly resolved and some new conflicts have begun to appear. There is also internal instability in some countries, such as Indonesia. These uncertainties have the potential to exert great influence on the regional security environment.

RUSSIA'S SECURITY POLICY TOWARD ASIA PACIFIC

More than two-thirds of Russia's territory is in Asia Pacific, so Russia is geographically more Asian than Eurasian. But viewed historically and politically, Russia (including the former Soviet Union) is more

European than Asian. After the collapse of the former Soviet Union, Russia lost the coastal port cities on the Baltic and Black seas, which means that it lost its important passageways to Europe and the outer world. Russia's foreign policy after the end of the cold war has been aimed mainly at establishing a closer relationship with Western countries and has not paid much attention to Asia Pacific. But Russia's pro-West foreign policy has met with difficulties as its role as a great power in world affairs is reduced by the ever increasing influence of Western countries and is even threatened by the expansion of the Western political and military bloc to its "near abroad." As early as 1992, the Russian government began to adjust its security strategy and to reformulate its policy toward the East or Asia Pacific. The new "two-headed eagle" policy originates from the Russian national emblem, and it means that Russian national security strategy will pay equal attention to the West and the East. President Boris Yeltsin's visit to South Korea, China, and India in late 1992 and early 1993 marked the beginning of this new policy. Since then, Russia has played an increasingly important role in the security affairs of Asia Pacific (Hsueh and Lu 1997, 375-390).

The goals of Russia's security strategy toward Asia Pacific can be summarized as follows. Russia wants to show its role as a great Eurasian power by engaging in the security affairs of Asia Pacific. The Russian Federation's foreign policy blueprint, drawn up in April 1993, states that strengthening Russia's diplomacy toward Asia would help to balance its relations with Western countries and to give better expression to Russia's status as a Eurasian country.

Russia strives to establish a "good-neighbor security zone" in Asia Pacific in order to meet the development of needs of the Russian economy in the Far East and Siberia. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia lost some natural resources bases in Europe and Central Asia. The resource-rich Far East and Siberia are now regarded as much more important strategically as their resources could be the basis for Russia's national economic rejuvenation in the next century. So it is crucial for Russia to establish good relationships with Asia Pacific countries and to gain their participation in the Russian economy. Then Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov argued that the key point of Russia's foreign policy toward Asia Pacific was to develop good-neighborly relations with all countries in the region in order to maintain peace and to provide the opportunity for domestic economic reform (TRA-TASS, Jakarta, 24 July 1996).

Russia wants to maintain and extend its influence in Asia Pacific. Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov stated that Russia should be more active in Asia Pacific affairs and should participate directly in the resolution of regional issues (*Independent Gazeta* 23 February 1999). The main reason why Russia emphasizes its influence in Asia Pacific is that it is afraid of being left in the lurch in the presently evolving configuration of regional security interests, thus affecting its strategic interest. Russia's first post-Soviet national security concept stated that Russia "[found] itself isolated" from Asia Pacific and that the situation was "unacceptable for [Russia] as an influential European Asian country" (*Washington Post* 25 December 1997). Former Russian Ambassador to the United States Vladimir Lukin suggests that in the past Russia saw itself as being ahead of Asia, though lagging behind Europe. But Asia has subsequently developed much faster. So Russia now finds itself to be not so much between "modern Europe" and "backward Asia," but rather occupying some strange middle space between two "Europes" (Lukin 1992, 60).

ACHIEVEMENTS OF RUSSIA'S SECURITY ENGAGEMENT IN ASIA PACIFIC

In order to achieve its strategic goals in the region, Russia is trying to establish security cooperation by improving bilateral security relations with countries in the region and participating in some regional security mechanisms. Overall, it is playing a much more important role in regional security affairs.

Russia's Proposals for Security Cooperation

Russia argues that a security mechanism for Asia Pacific must be established incrementally, meaning that mechanisms should be extended from bilateral to multilateral cooperation, from subregional to the whole region, from simple to advanced and comprehensive. When President Yeltsin visited South Korea in 1992, he advocated establishing a Northeast Asian multilateral security consulting mechanism. He suggested creating multilateral security dialogue mechanisms both on regional and subregional levels, a mediation center for regional conflicts, and a research center for theater strategy. At an August 1995 ARF conference, then Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev proposed "Principles for Security and Stability in Asia Pacific," which

emphasized promoting understanding, providing transparency on military actions, and establishing mechanisms for preventive diplomacy and peacekeeping (TRA-TASS, Bandar Seri Begawan 1 August 1995).

Russia's Bilateral Security Engagements

China The two countries have agreed to establish a "strategic partnership of cooperation." This partnership lays a foundation for two countries that have been party to hostilities for nearly thirty years to settle security matters such as border disputes in a friendly and cooperative way. Improved Sino-Russian relations actively influences the security situation in Asia Pacific. The establishment of this strategic partnership clears the way for other countries bordering China to pursue confidence-building measures in the border areas.

Japan The Northern Territories issue is still the biggest obstacle to Russia and Japan developing cooperative security relations. But in recent years, relations between the two countries have improved with some headway on the Northern Territories issue. In September 1992, a "Joint Compendium of Documents on the History of Territorial Problems between Japan and Russia" was released in both countries. In October 1993, President Yeltsin visited Japan and the Tokyo Declaration was signed after negotiations with Japanese Prime Minister Hosokawa Morihiro. The Tokyo Declaration established the clear basis for negotiations toward the conclusion of a peace treaty on the territorial issue based on historical and legal facts, mutually agreed on documents, and legal and judicial principles. Subsequently, there has been improved dialogue and exchanges between Russia and Japan. In June 1997, during the Group of Seven summit in Denver, President Yeltsin suggested that the two countries establish a strategic partnership. In November 1997, President Yeltsin and Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryūtarō met at Krasnoyarsk. This "no-necktie" summit was regarded as the beginning of the transition from political accommodation to cooperative engagement in relations between the two countries.

Other Countries Russia has signed a protocol of military cooperation with South Korea and has established a system of regular reciprocal visits by military leaders. Russia is also trying to reestablish a special

strategic partnership with India, mainly by supplying military equipment.

Russia's Multilateral Security Engagements

Russia is very enthusiastic about engaging in multilateral mechanisms to enhance Asia Pacific security because it believes that it has more sway and influence within these contexts—where the United States is constrained by other participants—than on a bilateral basis.

First, Russia is developing a strategic relationship with ASEAN. Since 1991, Russia has attended consultative meetings at ASEAN Post Ministerial Meetings. At the 26th ASEAN ministerial meeting in 1993, Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev expressed Russia's desire to institutionalize relations with ASEAN. Consequently, Russia was invited to be a member of ARF when it was established in 1994. In April 1995, Russia hosted an ARF track two seminar on the principles of security and stability in Asia Pacific in Moscow, as a contribution to peace and prosperity in the region. Russia was elevated to a "full dialogue partner" of ASEAN at the 29th ASEAN ministerial meeting in July 1997.

Second, in terms of Northeast Asian security affairs, Russia has taken part in the Trilateral Forum on North Pacific Security with Japan and the United States; the Northeast Asia Security Dialogue Conference with South Korea, the United States, and China; and a conference in Tokyo with fourteen countries' military officers on enhancing security in Asia Pacific.

FACTORS LIMITING RUSSIA'S ENGAGEMENT IN ASIA PACIFIC SECURITY

Although Russia is becoming a more important actor in Asia Pacific security affairs, its role is still limited—and will continue to be limited—by five factors.

The priority of Russia's foreign policy will continue to be relations with the West. Russia's government is still dominated by a pro-West elite; most of its leaders are more proficient in dealing with Western countries than with Asia Pacific countries. Russia also regards its western regions as strategically more dangerous and vulnerable than its eastern areas, especially after the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. So the priority of Russia's security strategy is still

to the West—despite the adoption of the “two-headed eagle” policy.

The economy of Russia’s Far East, which is the foundation for its entry into Asia Pacific, is very weak. For example, although Russia is interested in developing the natural resources of its Far East, neighboring countries such as Japan are skeptical about this plan. The weakness of Russia’s Far East economy will also restrict exchanges on security matters between Russia and Asia Pacific countries.

Disputes or problems relating to security matters between Russia and Asia Pacific countries—such as the territorial problem between Japan and Russia—will also limit Russia’s ability to become fully engaged in Asia Pacific security affairs.

As Zbigniew Brzezinski (1997, 118) wrote, Russia’s only real geostrategic option for a realistic international role and maximum opportunity to transform and modernize itself is Europe. While perhaps overstated, this argument is revealing about the geopolitical psychology of Russian leaders.

The domestic political situation in Russia is and will be uncertain for years. Domestic instability will undoubtedly limit Russia’s role in world affairs, including in Asia Pacific issues.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above analysis, Asia Pacific countries should engage Russia more positively and realistically on security issues. Asia Pacific countries could continue to support Russia’s engagement with Asia Pacific as a country belonging to the region. Every country could expand its dialogue or cooperation with Russia on security matters. The best way to engage Russia in Asia Pacific security affairs is to cooperate with Russia on regional economic issues, thus helping it to meet an important strategic goal.

Countries in Asia Pacific should admit the fact that Russia’s strategic and security priorities lie in Europe. Russia should not be expected to engage in every security issue of Asia Pacific, nor participate in every forum on regional security matters.

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