

CHAPTER 7

The Russian Presence in Regional Security

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MALAYSIA has functioned as an independent sovereign nation for more than 40 years, following independence on August 31, 1957. The country's strategic priorities are dictated by the goals of maintaining internal peace and harmony among its multiracial citizenry now totalling 21 million people. Externally, Malaysia's worldview is governed by a strong and unequivocal commitment to regionalism within the framework of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), established in 1967. There were originally five members of ASEAN: Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines. It increased to six members with the admission of Brunei in 1984, seven when Vietnam joined in 1995, eight and nine when Laos and Myanmar respectively were accepted in 1997, and ten with the entrance of Cambodia in 1999. The Malaysian perspective on ASEAN is best stated by Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. In a January 14, 1982, speech, Dr. Mahathir stated that "ASEAN remains in the forefront of Malaysia's foreign policy priorities in view of its vital role as a stabilising influence, and as a catalyst in developing the economic resilience of the region" (Murugesu and Lazarus 1984, 103–104).

Ideologically, Malaysia remains as strongly anticommunist as it was during the cold war. This ideological orientation resulted in certain inevitable foreign policy choices when options were narrowed by cold war politics. Malaysia opted for a pro-Western orientation in strategic and defense matters (Nathan 1995, 221) and a free-market, capitalist enterprise framework in its domestic political economy. Malaysia's firm stand

against international communism was reflected in a very cautious approach toward the communist powers — attitudes toward Russia became less negative as Moscow abandoned the path to revolution in Malaysia, although the Communist Party of Malaya insurgents were mainly pro-Beijing. Diplomatic relations were only established with the Soviet Union in 1967, after ten years of internal consolidation and development as an independent nation-state.

Malaysia no longer sees any security threat of an ideological nature stemming from the former Soviet Union, or even Communist China, which is viewed as having basically abandoned communism and embraced free-market, capitalist-oriented policies and practices. Since the communist armed conflict in Malaysia ended in 1989, Malaysia's armed forces have reorientated their strategic doctrine away from ideology and toward more conventional forms of defense.

Russia is viewed as a country in political and economic turmoil and as dependent on Western aid to manage the transition from socialism to democracy. The burdens of transition have effectively removed Russia as a major player in the post-cold war Asian balance of power. Moscow's strategic influence in Asia has also declined with its former allies — Vietnam and India — opting for market-oriented reforms and searching for partnerships with capitalist-oriented democracies in Asia. Nevertheless, Russia's future role is of direct concern to *all* players in Asia Pacific, including Malaysia. Moscow's perception of threats arising from areas adjacent to its borders makes developments in the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Russian Far East very relevant to Asia Pacific security. Moscow's ability — or lack thereof — to determine the scope and direction of its relations with Japan, Korea, China, and ASEAN will also affect its security role in Asia Pacific.

RUSSIA AND SECURITY IN ASIA PACIFIC

The State of Regional Security

Malaysia regards three factors as having contributed to Asia Pacific's rapid transformation: the absence of ideological conflict, a rise in national and regional resilience, and the economic dynamism of East Asia. The strategic orientation of major players such as the United States, Japan, China, the European Union, Russia, India, and ASEAN will be of particular significance to Asia Pacific as the turn of the century nears. Malaysia welcomes the revitalization of the U.S.-Japan security alliance

after its role in maintaining strategic stability during the cold war. The demise of bipolarity poses greater challenges for the durability of this security alliance though. The simple bipolar system has been replaced by a set of circumstances that is "more differentiated and more complex than before. It also provides a much weaker underpinning for the relationship" (Harris 1997, 182). Strategic uncertainties could increase without a concrete multilateral security structure in place. Since 1994 the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) has attempted to initiate multilateral dialogue on security with all of the major and medium-sized actors in Asia Pacific, but it cannot be relied on to perform in critical situations such as that on the Korean peninsula, or in mitigating conflict in the Spratlys. In this context, Malaysia does appreciate the role played by the United States, whose strategic presence has thus far guaranteed the security of sea lanes and reduced the prospect of intraregional conflict over the Spratly Islands.¹

The rise of China has caused apprehension in certain ASEAN states. China's future role and interests as a major Asian power need to be accommodated, but within a multilateral security framework strengthened by essentially bilateral security arrangements. The U.S.-Japan alliance, the U.S.-South Korea Mutual Defense Treaty, the special security arrangements between the United States and Taiwan, the U.S.-Singapore memorandum of understanding on a rotational military presence, and the Australia-Indonesia Security Agreement are examples of the latter. Multilateral security arrangements such as the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA, involving Malaysia, Singapore, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand), ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, and the United States), and the Manila Pact (which ensures American security cooperation with Thailand and the Philippines) add to the existing mosaic of regional security. For instance, besides enhancing regional security, the FPDA creates and strengthens political, economic, technological, and military linkages among member-states (Baginda 1995, 19-20).

In the post-cold war era, Malaysia's approach to national and regional security is premised more on the principle of security cooperation than the need for military alliances. Military alliances are seen as interim measures which must make way for broader concepts of comprehensive, cooperative, and multilateral security for Asia Pacific as a whole. For Malaysia, comprehensive security denotes mutuality and interdependence between the political, economic, social, cultural, environmental and physical dimensions of security, all of which augment

the resilience of the nation-state. Cooperative security is not viewed as a threat-based concept, but as an integral element of comprehensive security in that cooperation is based on an inclusive approach whereby all key players and legitimate interest groups are factored into the equation of security (Hassan and Ramnath 1996, 12–14).

Post-cold war conceptions of regional security rest on the establishment of a Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEA-NWFZ). Although none of the states in Southeast Asia are potential nuclear powers, their symbolic commitment to nuclear nonproliferation would strengthen the moral pressure, especially on the nuclear weapons states, for pursuing the logic of complete nuclear disarmament in the future. Malaysia views creating a Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) in Southeast Asia and SEA-NWFZ as essential confidence-building measures for establishing a post-cold war Asia Pacific security structure premised on the principles of comprehensive and cooperative security. It is in this context that the treaty declaring SEA-NWFZ was signed by all ASEAN members and Cambodia at the Fifth ASEAN Summit in Bangkok in December 1995.²

Malaysia is concerned about the future of Russia's relations with Japan, Korea, and China. The cold war still continues on the Korean peninsula and, as a military and nuclear superpower, Russia definitely has a role to play in easing tensions and in promoting prospects for Korean reunification. Russia could also be positively involved in disarming North Korea of any nuclear-weapons potential while addressing Pyongyang's security dilemma.

With respect to the Northern Territories, Malaysia views the situation as improving since both Japan and Russia appear to be deeply committed to finding a peaceful and equitable solution before 2000—although such efforts might still prove to be elusive given political sensitivities on both sides. The settlement of this territorial dispute—a remnant from World War II—would greatly enhance Russo-Japanese cooperation, improve the security atmosphere, and assist considerably in Russia's economic rehabilitation.

Russia's present relevance to Malaysia is largely economic, although Malaysia has purchased 18 MiG fighter aircraft worth US\$50 million as part of its policy of diversifying the sources of its defense weaponry and as an endorsement of its policy of maintaining equidistance with all powers. Malaysia also intends to strengthen bilateral cooperation in trade, investment, science, and technology. The July 1997 visit to

Malaysia by Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov after the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Kuala Lumpur underscored mutual interest in promoting economic and political cooperation. Malaysia also feels that Russian help could be solicited on international issues such as reform of the UN Security Council, and creating a ZOPFAN and SEA-NWFZ.

Regionalism and Multilateral Security

For Malaysia, regionalism rooted in ASEAN offers the best prospects for regional stability, development, security, and prosperity. ASEAN is like a magnet that has attracted to the region suitors with vision who want to energize regional cooperation in Southeast Asia for mutual benefit. ASEAN has successfully established dialogue relationships with all major economic and political entities in the world: the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, the European Union, South Korea, China, India, and Russia. These relationships create an atmosphere conducive to substantive discussions of regional security in Asia Pacific.

ASEAN can now claim to be a regional organization that incorporates all ten states of Southeast Asia following the admission of Cambodia, its tenth member, in April 1999. The inauguration of ASEAN-10 can be viewed as a major political victory for the association in terms of strengthening regional peace and security. A strengthened ASEAN would be conducive to establishing a multilateral security framework for Southeast Asia and the wider Asia Pacific.

Nevertheless, Malaysia is aware that the multilateralization of security in Asia will continue to be problematic in the near and distant future for several reasons: There are sharp differences in levels of development within ASEAN, and among Asian states in general, as well as serious divergences in national perceptions of "common threats" to national and regional security. Persistent territorial disputes and maritime/resource-based conflicts between ASEAN members also complicate matters. Additionally, there are divergent perceptions about the utility of the security role played by external powers through formal and informal alliance arrangements with Asian states. Finally, there are varied perceptions by medium and smaller Asian states regarding the rise of China and India and their strategic roles and influence into the twenty-first century.

Malaysia recognizes that existing bilateral and regional security structures were not designed for the post-cold war situation. An attempt

was made to address this problem by expanding the ASEAN-PMC (Post Ministerial Conference) mechanism into the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). The ARF, which was officially inaugurated in Bangkok in July 1994, currently comprises twenty countries. These include the ASEAN-9 (Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam), ASEAN's ten dialogue partners (Australia, Canada, the European Union, Japan, South Korea, the United States, New Zealand, China, India, and Russia), and Papua New Guinea. Malaysia views the ARF as the most acceptable and least controversial mechanism to manage pan-Asian security in the post-cold war era. The principal features of the ARF, in this writer's view, are:

- it is a security dialogue inviting and engaging all interested and involved participants to express and moderate their security concerns;
- it includes all the key Asian and Pacific actors: China, India, Russia, the United States, Japan, Korea, and ASEAN;
- it is a process involving some informal procedures by which security issues are raised and discussed at the annual meeting;
- it is a nonthreatening mechanism or security framework as the agenda for discussion is set by ASEAN—a regional grouping whose credibility and political acceptability is beyond question; and
- it is a confidence-building measure in the sense that the security dialogue rests firmly on a foundation of economic and political consultations via the ASEAN-PMC, and builds on this foundation of promise and performance.

The ARF espouses all the fundamental principles of ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) signed at its first summit in Bali in 1976. Article 2 of the TAC outlines the basic framework for ASEAN security cooperation:

- mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, and national identity of all nations;
- the right of every state to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion, or coercion;
- noninterference in the internal affairs of one another;
- settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means;
- renunciation of the threat or use of force; and
- effective cooperation among themselves.

In the wake of the Asian financial crisis since June 1997, political developments in intra-ASEAN relations indicate that the overwhelming majority of the grouping prefers strong adherence to the principles

contained in the TAC and the ZOPFAN Declaration. In rejecting the Thai and Philippine call for a change in ASEAN's nonintervention policy, Malaysia and six other ASEAN members felt that any form of interference in internal affairs of a member would undermine the principle of mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and independence, and would ultimately weaken the regional grouping (*Star* 22 July 1998, 4).

The U.S. role in Asia Pacific security is viewed by Malaysia as unique but positive. Whether the United States acts within or outside of the ARF framework, Asia Pacific states in general prefer strategic stability based on a continued U.S. military presence in the region. Nevertheless, Malaysia feels the U.S. role in Asia should not be founded on the principle of containing China. Malaysia itself has lately taken a more sanguine view of a resurgent China. A major factor in the new evaluation of China is its economic and trade performance. For example, two-way trade between the United States and China soared from US\$7.7 billion in 1985 to US\$57.3 billion in 1995. Trade between Japan and China grew from US\$19 billion to US\$57.9 billion in the same ten years, while that of the European Union with China jumped from US\$8.5 billion to US\$53.1 billion in the ten-year period (Holmes and Przystup 1997, 247). The significant expansion of China-ASEAN economic relations also informs the revised Malaysian approach toward Beijing.

ASEAN and Malaysian Perceptions of Russia in Regional Security

Asia Pacific perceptions of a threat from Russia arise from many sources. These include internal political instability due to the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union, which has created domestic power vacuums and still fluctuating political realignments; economic instability due to the tentative introduction of market-driven processes that have not yet produced price stability, economic opportunity, and growth to benefit all sectors of society; and military instability arising from dramatic cuts in the military budget, the evaporation of ideologically induced external threats, badly demoralized armed forces, and a severe financial incapability to service critical sectors of Russian military power. Other factors contributing to concern about Russia include its external isolation arising from its political, economic, and military weaknesses, coupled with the demise of Soviet-led cold war alliances and the U.S.-led effort to expand the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Europe, which is viewed by Moscow as a policy to encircle Russia; and nationalist and

anti-Russian sentiment in the former Soviet Republics in Central Asia, where several million Russians live whose security is a factor in Russian national security. A final point of concern is the uncontrolled migration of ethnic Chinese into the Russian Far East from an area with a population density ten times that of Russia east of the Ural Mountains.

Mikhail Gorbachev's "new thinking" paradigm has significantly influenced the course of Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet era. The key elements of this paradigm are major inputs into ASEAN—and thus Malaysian—perceptions of post-cold war Russia, and the prospects for its integration and engagement with Asia Pacific. The components of the paradigm are:

- The use of military power, geopolitical expansionism, and empire building are outdated forms of international conduct that impose significant costs and impede socioeconomic development.
- Status and power are determined by qualitative indicators, such as the effectiveness of the political system, economic efficiency, and adaptability to rapid scientific and technological progress.
- The internal resources of a nation, including a high level of education and technical skill of the population, as well as the country's quality and way of life, are important factors in international influence.
- Interests in world affairs are more effectively promoted through multilateral approaches and participation in international institutions. Security is best safeguarded politically and cooperatively, and not through unilateral or military/technical means.
- Although the nation-state continues to be an important organizing principle in the international system, nationalism is one of the many forms of unilateralism that needs to be replaced by processes of integration.
- The main actors and factors of stability in the international system are the industrialized countries (the Group of Seven), who adhere to a common system of values, laws, and norms.
- The main factors of instability and threats to world peace are nationalism, ethnic conflict, religious fundamentalism, political extremism, migration, terrorism, environmental catastrophes, weapons proliferation, and armed aggression from the south.³

The economic impact of a reforming Russia is yet to be felt in Asia, although more positive political attitudes are clearly visible in, for

example, the Sino-Russian rapprochement and the improvement in ASEAN-Russian relations. As the principal successor state of the Soviet Union, Russia has shown a keen interest in integrating itself economically with East and Southeast Asia; indeed, the region's dynamic economic performance will continue to serve as the primary pull-factor for Russian interest. According to official Soviet statistics, the Soviet Union's exports to its major trading partners in Asia Pacific (Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia, China, Japan, North Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand, the Philippines, and South Korea) at the end of the cold war totaled US\$10.4 billion or 10.4 percent of its total exports, while imports from East Asia totaled US\$10.3 billion or 8.8 percent of total Soviet imports (Goncharenko 1991, 11). Given the impressive average gross national product growth rates of between 7 percent to 10 percent for most of these countries from the 1980s to the mid-1990s, Russia is even more convinced that its own economic future lies in "the gradual integration of [its] economy into the already formed economic structure of East Asia" (Goncharenko 1991, 11). Internal economic reform and external economic integration would cumulatively have the effect of enabling Russia to be regarded as a friendly and benign power—at least in the near term—rather than one that threatens the stability and prosperity of Asia Pacific. Domestic developments have, however, tended to increase the preoccupation of Moscow's leaders with internal political, constitutional, economic, and social matters.⁴ But an economically reforming Russia would make ASEAN less concerned about a prospective Russian threat to the security of the region. Conversely, ASEAN would stand to benefit politically and economically from integrating Russia into the Asian power equation of China, Japan, India, and the United States.

The relevance of Russian power to Southeast Asia would be largely economic, in terms of expanding opportunities for market diversification and strengthening ASEAN's industrial and export potential. Indeed, Russia's ongoing economic transformation toward a more capitalist-oriented free enterprise economy facilitates the establishment of a good framework for bilateral cooperation with ASEAN countries. For instance, numerous agreements have already been signed between Malaysia and Russia in the areas of trade, air services, maritime matters, culture, and economic and technical cooperation ("Statement by Malaysian Foreign Minister" 1997, 5). Russian interest in Southeast Asia would focus on economic cooperation with ASEAN as a strategy to

influence the regional balance of power in favor of Moscow's long-term political and security interests vis-à-vis China, Japan, the United States, and India.

The strategic environment confronting Russia at the turn of the twentieth century—both internally and externally—is complex. Russia remains a major military and nuclear power, with vast natural resources available for exploitation and development in the Russian Far East, and its threat perceptions of China, Japan, Korea, and the United States weigh critically in its foreign policy. A favorable regional and global security environment and bilateral and multilateral economic cooperation would be beneficial to Russia and its neighbors in the Asia Pacific.

CONCLUSION

Russia's successful engagement in Asia over the next decade requires concerted efforts by regional players who view Russia's peaceful integration into the security architecture of Asia Pacific as an exercise in mutual benefit. While Russia's security role in Asia Pacific has declined considerably in the short term, Moscow's future role should not be discounted. Within five to ten years, Russia can be expected to resurge as a major world power with a capacity to project its security interests in the region. Russia's political, economic, and military involvement in Asia Pacific also contributes to the emergence of stable Russian policies vis-à-vis Central Asia. Isolating Russia could result in an inward focus of Russian security concerns, with additional pressures being placed on the former Soviet republics.

The future of multilateral security in Asia Pacific depends on the evolution of the ARF—how it develops as an Asia Pacific-wide effort to institutionalize security cooperation. Russia's emerging productive bilateral relations with Japan, China, South Korea, and the United States greatly help the prospects for multilateral security in Asia Pacific. The holding of regular bilateral summits among four of the major Asian powers—China, Russia, Japan, and the United States—is another positive trend for multilateral security.⁵

Russian diplomacy on key regional security issues is viewed positively in the overall context of the Southeast Asian and the Asia Pacific balance of power. Moscow's support for ASEAN's policies on human rights and nonintervention in internal affairs impacts positively on Malaysian as well as ASEAN perceptions of post-Soviet Russia and

contributes toward the constructive engagement of Russia in Asia Pacific (*Asia Yearbook* 1998, 191). As Russia is one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, its role in helping the reform process in international organization to accord more with current realities would be viewed with interest by Malaysia and ASEAN.

The sixth ARF in Singapore, held July 24–25, 1999, had to contend with several key security issues: the May 1998 nuclear tests by India and Pakistan and the Kashmir issue, which intermittently strain Indian-Pakistani bilateral relations; escalating tensions between Taiwan and China; rising tension on the Korean peninsula; and regional disputes such as the competing claims on the Spratlys (*New Straits Times* 21 July 1999). ASEAN is interested in establishing a nuclear-free world and expects the major nuclear powers—especially Russia and the United States—to eliminate their massive nuclear stockpiles in accordance with the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) (*New Straits Times* 27 July 1998, 2). Both the United States and Russia are seizing the opportunity of the end of the cold war to “substantially reduce their arsenals from Cold War peaks, and have taken steps to ensure that these reductions are irreversible” (Hirsch and Scheinman 1998, 137). As the economic downturn begins to impact more heavily on the defense budget and military procurements (Morrison 1998, 90), Malaysia’s commitment to comprehensive security—with less emphasis on the military dimension of regional security⁶—will be reflected by increased support for multilateral security through the ARF mechanism. Moscow’s participation with Japan and the United States in the Trilateral Forum for resolving regional security issues in the North Pacific, especially on the Korean peninsula, is yet another important dimension of engaging Russia in Asia Pacific in the twenty-first century.

NOTES

1. For example, former Philippine Defense Secretary Renato de Villa expressed fears that a U.S. military withdrawal from the Philippines could trigger armed conflict for control of the oil-rich Spratlys in the South China Sea claimed by the Philippines, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Malaysia. See the *Star* (4 September 1991, 18).

2. For a more cautious and less optimistic appraisal of the prospects for SEANWFZ, see Alagappa (1987).

3. This summary of the main ingredients in Gorbachev's "new thinking" paradigm is from Adomeit (1995, 42).

4. Evidence of serious internal political troubles confronting post-Soviet Russia include an anti-Yeltsin uprising in Moscow in October 1993; the costly and abortive military campaign to subdue Chechen rebels, and the subsequent withdrawal of Russian troops by Yeltsin in December 1994; and Yeltsin's hiring and firing of prime ministers in 1998–1999 for failure to resolve the economic crisis.

5. For example, in 1997 Japanese Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryūtarō met with U.S. President Bill Clinton at the Group of Seven summit in Denver, Colorado, that June. In September, Hashimoto then met Chinese President Jiang Zemin in Beijing. In November, Hashimoto met with Russian President Boris Yeltsin in Krasnoyarsk, Siberia. That same month also witnessed a Sino-Russian summit in Beijing. A month earlier, Jiang met Clinton in the United States.

6. In this approach to security, issues pertaining to transnational crime such as illicit drug trafficking, terrorism, arms smuggling, money laundering, trafficking in women and children, and piracy are viewed as more critical to regional security in the post-cold war era. See *New Straits Times* (27 July 1998, 2).

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