

Russian Security Policy and the Prospects for Multilateralism in the Asia-Pacific

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With the breakup of the Soviet Union and the decline of Russian military and economic power, Moscow lost much of its former influence in the Asia-Pacific region (APR). Many regional actors feel that Russia currently does not have much to offer to other Asia-Pacific countries. However, this does not mean that Russia has lost interest in the APR, nor agreed to the role of a sidelined player. On the contrary, Russian strategic planners view the Asia-Pacific as an important priority for Moscow's international policy. The Asia-Pacific is seen as both a promising market for Russian products and a potential source of investments and advanced technology. In particular, Moscow believes that cooperation with Asia-Pacific nations could help to revive the Russian Far East.

Despite the end of confrontation with the United States and China, Russia is still uneasy about a number of developments in the area. Russia worries about the rise of resurgent powers in the Asia-Pacific. There are several unresolved territorial disputes in Russia's vicinity (including the Russian-Japanese conflict over the Kurile Islands). Some key players (especially the United States) tend to ignore Russia in discussing the most important regional problems. Along with China, Russia is anxious about growing American-Japanese military cooperation. Some of the recent American security initiatives (for example, US plans to create an East Asian anti-ballistic missile defense system) are perceived by Russian strategists as destabilizing and threatening to Russian security interests. Moreover, Moscow is concerned about the fact that in contrast with other regions where Russia has security interests (such as Nordic and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Sino-Russian border) the APR lacks a reliable multilateral security regime.

Theoretically, several options are available to Russia. First, Moscow can try to restore its former military power and challenge American strategic leadership in the region. However, given a continuing decline of Russian economic and military potentials (not to mention the possible reaction of other regional players), this variant seems unrealistic. Second, Moscow can opt for a diametrically opposed scenario and assume the role of America's junior partner in the APR. This could entail resolution of the Kurile dispute on Japanese terms and ending Sino-Russian military-technical cooperation. However, this option is improbable as well because neither the Russian domestic situation nor Moscow's geopolitical interests are conducive to such a radical change.

Third, Russia can try to transform the current Sino-Russian "limited strategic partnership" to a strategic alliance, and similar to the first scenario, provoke a sort of new Cold War in

the APR. However, neither Moscow nor Beijing is ready for further rapprochement. Their common security interests are basically limited to military-technical cooperation, confidence-building on the Sino-Russian border, containing Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia, preventing the rise of resurgent powers in the Asia-Pacific, and counterbalancing the growing American influence in the region. At the same time, they have a number of divergent interests and even disagreements (such as Chinese illegal migration to the Russian Far East, cloning of Russian weapons for export purposes, Beijing's nuclear cooperation with Pakistan, and China's reluctance to take decisive measures against piracy in the South China and East China Seas), which effectively prevent building a strategic alliance between the two countries. Finally, Russia can contribute to creating a stable multilateral security system in the Asia-Pacific. Obviously, under the present circumstances this option is both realistic and preferable for Moscow. In such a system, Russia could feel secure and find a regional mission of its own.

Russia's security strategy in the region includes three major components--nuclear policy, conventional arms control, and confidence-building initiatives and building multilateral institutions.

Nuclear Policies

Russia's policy in this area boils down to four key strategies:

1. Defensive nuclear doctrine

Along with other nuclear powers, Russia has reduced its nuclear forces in the Far East. The number of strategic submarines in the Russian Pacific fleet fell from 32 in 1986 to 11 in 1997. Over the same period, the number of mid-range bombers potentially armed with nuclear weapons decreased from 160 to 9. Moscow also tries to persuade regional actors that it has no intention of using its nuclear potential against them. For instance, the September 1994, Yeltsin-Jiang communiqué mentioned several CSBMs, including no-first-use of nuclear weapons and retargeting nuclear missiles away from each other's territory. Russia also declared that it retargeted its missiles away from the US, and endorsed the Sino-American agreement on the same issue in June 1998.

2) Denuclearization of the region

Moscow's objective is not only to reduce the threat of a nuclear conflict in the region but also to engage regional players in the process of gradual denuclearization of the APR. For example, there are a number of Russian-Japanese projects aimed at constructing facilities in Russia to store nuclear material retrieved from dismantled warheads, as well as facilities to process liquid radioactive wastes in Vladivostok, and to treat liquid missile fuel. Russia reacted positively to the establishment of the Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (NWFZ) Treaty in late 1995, although it has some reservations and, for this reason, has not signed the protocol to the treaty.

3) *Nuclear non-proliferation policy*

Moscow was concerned about North Korea's nuclear program and expressed its satisfaction with the 1994 US-North Korean framework agreement aimed at stopping this dangerous development. Russia was also worried by China's nuclear exports to Iran and Pakistan and tacitly supported US efforts to stop this practice. Moscow was very happy when the PRC adopted nuclear export control regulations in 1997. Along with the US, EU and Japan, Russia initiated discussion of nuclear proliferation in South Asia at the 1998 meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Manila. Moscow hoped that ARF discussions could persuade India, which is a member of the Forum, to stop its military nuclear program.

4) *The Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty*

Russia not only contributed to adopting the CTBT by the UN General Assembly in September 1996 but also encouraged the Asia-Pacific nations to sign and ratify the treaty. Moscow is interested in establishing a CTBT verification system that would consist of a network of seismic and hydro-acoustic stations around the world. However, Russia lacks money to make any substantial contribution to such a system.

Conventional Arms Control and CSBMs

Another crucial element of Russian security policy in East Asia is promotion of the arms control process and confidence-building among the nations of the region. Because of the different conditions and experiences that prevail, the conventional arms control process in the Asia-Pacific tends to concentrate on CSBMs combined with various peacekeeping, preventive diplomacy and stabilizing activities rather than on disarmament and arms reductions.

The Russian confidence-building strategy in the region focuses on the following issues:

- *Reduction of armed forces and armaments in border areas.*

In deference to Japan, Russia is conducting a program of gradual demilitarization of the four disputed Kurile Islands. The number of Russian troops currently stationed there is around 3,500, with none on Shikotan Island. Russian leaders have assured Japan of Moscow's intention to totally withdraw Russian troops from the islands.

Russia and China have also significantly reduced their forces in the border areas. In 1992, Russia completed the withdrawal of troops from Mongolia initiated by Gorbachev in 1987. In 1986-97, the number of Russian divisions in the Far Eastern Strategic Theater decreased from 57 to 23, and the number of tanks from 14,900 to 10,068. The number of surface-to-surface missiles decreased from 363 to 102; the number of attack helicopters from 1,000 to 310; and the number of combat aircraft from 1,125 to 500. The number of submarines in the Pacific Fleet fell from 109 (32 strategic and 77 tactical) to 39 (11 strategic and 28 tactical), and the number of principal surface combatants decreased from

82 to 39. China also reduced its forces in the border regions and made their configuration less offensive. While in 1986 the Shenyang, Beijing and Lanzhou military districts had 10 armored, one airborne and 61 infantry divisions, in the ensuing ten-year period they had only 7 armored, 46 infantry and 2 artillery divisions (the airborne division has been disbanded).

On April 24, 1997, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan concluded a breakthrough border treaty aimed at reducing troop levels within a 100 km band on either side of a shared border. The treaty also sets up limitations for border guard troops, and led to disengagement of armed forces in the areas of their direct confrontation and where there was a high risk of accidental armed conflict.

- *Prevention of dangerous military activities.*

In July 1994, the Russian and Chinese defense ministers signed an agreement to prevent incidents between their armies, such as combat aircraft crossing into the other country's airspace. It also regulates unsanctioned missile launches, the use of lasers that could harm the other side and the jamming of communication equipment. In an April 1996 summit meeting in Shanghai, the PRC signed an agreement on preventing border incidents with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Russia and Japan conduct annual consultations on preventing incidents at sea beyond their territorial waters and air-space.

A multilateral dialogue on prevention of dangerous military activities in the seas could also be a crucial element of an emerging security regime in the region. An important agenda item for future negotiations is the issue of avoiding accidents and providing accident assistance. Along with other nuclear powers, Russia could participate in an agreement on setting the strategic nuclear submarine navigation zones where all anti-submarine activities would be prohibited. It may also be possible to negotiate an agreement to prevent accidents between military vessels. At a minimum, there should be an exchange of assurances that assistance will be provided and accepted when needed. This could be codified in special agreements between Asia-Pacific countries, or it could be done as an expansion of or in a protocol to the US-Russian Incidents at Sea (1972) and Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities (1989) agreements. It might prevent or reduce the risks of accidents between major naval powers in the APR.

- *Spatial and temporal limitation of military activities, exercises and maneuvers.*

In November 1993, the Russian and Chinese defense ministers agreed to inform each other of plans for military maneuvers in border districts. The provisions--which include a pledge of warning preceding military exercises, limits on the number and types of exercises permitted within 100km of the border, notifications prior to maneuvers and the attendance of exercises by observers--were incorporated in an agreement signed by four CIS states (Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) and the PRC in April 1996. CSBMs have also been initiated between the border-security forces of the two countries. In April 1996, Russia and Japan agreed on enhancing transparency and mutual notification of large-scale exercises.

- *Military-to-military contacts, joint exercises, exchanges and visits.*

In November 1993, the Russian and Chinese defense ministers signed a 5-year agreement providing for regular consultations between the two ministries, the establishment of direct ties between adjoining Russian and Chinese military districts, military exchanges, and an increase in the number of military attachés. In late 1994, Admiral Feliks Gromov, commander of the Russian Navy, signed agreements on military cooperation, including joint naval exercises. By 1997 about 200 Chinese officers were trained in Russian military academies. Also significant is the fact that China and Russia have resumed intelligence ties.

Military-to-military contacts are also developing between Moscow and Tokyo. In April 1996 the two countries signed a document agreeing to implement various CSBMs, including exchange visits by naval vessels. In May 1997, the two sides agreed to intensify their security dialogue and conduct further exchanges. In July 1998, the first Russian-Japanese naval maneuvers aimed at execution of a rescue operation took place in the northeastern part of the Sea of Japan. Further, in November 1992, the Russian and South Korean presidents signed a memorandum providing for military exchanges and naval visits between Vladivostok and Pusan.

Regional Security Forums

The active engagement of regional governments and some global actors in institutionalized dialogue and consultation on regional security issues is an important instrument for confidence-building and creating a multilateral security system in the APR. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), established in July 1993, is a key multilateral institution of that kind. A gradual evolutionary approach to regional security problems has been adopted by the ARF. This evolution will take place in three stages: 1) promotion of CSBMs; 2) development of preventive diplomacy mechanisms; and 3) development of conflict-resolution mechanisms. The ARF currently focuses on the first stage, and some limited preventive diplomacy measures are discussed, as well.

Russia is willing to cooperate with ASEAN on security issues. Moscow supports the ARF's three-stage approach to the creation of a multilateral security system in the Asia-Pacific but encourages this organization to move more quickly to the second and third phases (preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution). At the third ARF in Jakarta (July 23, 1996), Primakov proposed extending the CSBMs established by the 1996 agreement between China and the four CIS countries to the entire APR. The Russian Foreign Minister favored a joint program on fighting drug-trade. He also stressed the significance of economic interdependency for stability in the region. For this reason, Primakov proposed developing a number of multilateral projects such as the "Greater Mekong" (which promotes economic development among states along the Mekong river, including Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam), the Eurasian railroad, and creation of a regional space monitoring and communication center.

At the fourth ARF in July 1997, Primakov acknowledged the contribution of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (signed by the ASEAN countries in 1976 in Bali), to ensuring peace and stability in the region, and stated that Russia is willing to accede to it. The Russian Foreign Minister suggested an increased role for the ARF in resuming inter-Korean dialogue.

Primakov also proposed an ambitious program of new CSBMs and institutional changes in the ARF, including: 1) CSBMs in the border areas, including introduction of the practice of exchange of information on the armed forces and border troops deployed in border areas; 2) additional stabilizing measures such as: renunciation of military exercises directed against neighboring states; limitation of the scale, geographical scope and number of military exercises; notification of large-scale military activity and redeployment of troops due to emergencies; mutual invitation of observers to military exercises; and the establishment of direct communications lines between local army staff centers; 3) the use of existing cooperation between individual Asia-Pacific countries in high-seas incident prevention with the aim of drafting in the ARF framework a region-wide agreement on the subject; 4) exclusion from military doctrines of ARF participants on a reciprocal basis of references to each other as potential adversaries, and inclusion of a provision on willingness to consider each other as partners in strengthening regional security; 5) setting up an informal working group attached to the ARF Chairman, called "Friends of the Chairman," to improve the work of information, analytical and implementation mechanisms during intersessional periods; 6) creation of a regional earthquake early-warning system; and 7) establishment of a regional search and rescue center employing Russian Spasatel (rescuer) amphibious planes.

At the fifth ARF meeting in Manila in July 1998, Prime Minister Primakov proposed a broad program of naval CSBMs, including a) exchange of information on the purpose of naval activities, structure of forces, time frame, areas, and level of command of the activities; b) notification of large-scale exercises and movements of naval forces; c) invitation of observers to naval exercises; d) joint exercises on search and rescue at sea, and assistance to victims of natural disasters; and e) mutual renunciation of exercises and maneuvers in sea straits, fishing zones and the air-space above them. Primakov also noted that joint activities of ARF member states aimed at developing special measures to combat crime in ports, littoral areas of states, their inland and territorial waters as well as on the open sea, could become another promising area of naval cooperation. It would also be appropriate to consider the conclusion of multilateral agreements on the prevention of incidents at sea beyond territorial waters, based on the existing system of relevant bilateral agreements between leading naval powers. According to Primakov, a regional agreement on this issue could become of key importance for the strengthening of strategic stability in the Pacific.

The Russia-ASEAN dialogue has been institutionalized. A Senior Officials Meeting mechanism has been established to hold regular consultations between Russia and ASEAN, as well as to implement decisions. In October 1996, an ASEAN Moscow Committee consisting of the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister and ambassadors of the ASEAN countries was set up to facilitate a diplomatic dialogue between the partners. In

June 1997, an ASEAN-Russia Joint Cooperation Committee was created to promote broad cooperation between Moscow and this organization. In November 1997, the Russian government set up an inter-agency Commission on ASEAN Affairs chaired by the Deputy Foreign Minister and consisting of representatives of different executive bodies.

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) process, which started at the first Asia-Europe summit in Bangkok in March 1996, might also have some implications for Russia. Asia-Pacific countries (particularly Japan and South Korea), the major West European powers and the US could pool their expertise and financial resources and cooperate to help the reform process in the Russian Far East. Such cooperation could cover, for example, technical assistance for the administrative reform efforts of local governments, cooperation in tackling environmental problems, assistance in eliminating nuclear weapons and their platforms, and the re-education of military officers for new jobs.

It should be noted that regional security institution-building in the Asia-Pacific is no longer an exclusively inter-governmental affair. A number of non-governmental actors are increasingly active in promoting dialogues and suggesting policy options on regional security. Such organizations as the ASEAN Institute for Strategic and International Studies and Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP) (with 14 countries represented, including Russia) played a key role in pushing ASEAN in the direction of a formal process of security dialogue including conflict resolution, CSBMs, arms sales issues, and regional maritime cooperation. In April 1996, a seminar on security and stability in the APR was held in Moscow. A Code of Inter-State Conduct for the Asia-Pacific ("Pacific Concord") was discussed at the seminar. In September 1998, Russia organized an international conference on security in the APR in Vladivostok. A revised version of the "Pacific Concord" has been submitted to conference participants.

Conclusion

The Russian security approach is generally conducive to multilateralism in the Asia-Pacific. Russia perceives the APR countries as partners rather than enemies. Its security policy is based on a combination of both bilateral and multilateral dialogues rather than a preference for one over the other. A future security system in the Asia-Pacific is seen as an intricate nexus of shifting and flexible arrangements, formal and informal dialogues, bilateral, subregional, regional and global regimes and mechanisms--rather than a unipolar, bipolar or other rigid multilateral structure.

According to this view, Russia should play a key role in creating such a system via its active engagement in regional cooperation both in the "hard" and "soft" security domains. Moscow demonstrates its readiness to contribute to the regional security process by the radical changes in its nuclear policies and military doctrine, armed forces reductions, arms control initiatives and introduction of an impressive CSBM program. Russia successfully established and institutionalized a security dialogue with key regional actors ranging from China, Japan and the US to the ASEAN, ARF and APEC.

Despite a number of obstacles such as Russia's current weakness and the attempts by some states to ignore Moscow in discussing regional problems and the financial crisis in East Asia, Russian strategic planners believe that Moscow is able to contribute to the peaceful and progressive development of the APR. Building a new security architecture in the region will not be easy, as there is very little tradition of security cooperation, particularly on a multilateral basis. Perhaps the time is not yet ripe for far-reaching initiatives, and some Russian proposals are premature. However, the countries of the region and global actors should at least start gradually moving towards a new regional security order. Otherwise, the Asia-Pacific could get bogged down in the endless process of an arms race, or in ethnic, religious and territorial conflicts.

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