
22. Russian–US relations in Asia–Pacific

Mikhail G. Nosov

I. Introduction

Separated as they are by the Pacific Ocean, both Russia and the United States regard the security of East Asia as a major foreign policy goal. As an integral part of the region they maintain close political and economic ties with East Asian states, have a sizeable military contingent deployed in the Pacific and consider this part of the world an area of their national interests. However, the regional status of the two countries, many of their goals, following from their national security needs, and their means of reaching these goals differ greatly.

II. From ideological confrontation to political pragmatism

The two superpowers long viewed East Asia through the lens of ideological confrontation. After World War II and until the early 1970s the Soviet Union enjoyed great advantages in the region over its counterpart. Mongolia was constructing socialism, revolution succeeded in China and a solid Sino-Soviet alliance was forged without delay. Even North Korea, despite three years of war, had far more impressive economic and military potential than its southern neighbour. Burma declined to join the Commonwealth of Nations and started building socialism. The larger part of Laos was under communist control. Indonesia was ruled by Sukarno's 'guided democracy' with communists participating in the government; Prince Sihanouk closed down the US Embassy in Cambodia; and partisans in the Philippines and Malaya kept up opposition to government forces. North Viet Nam prepared to absorb the South, and even Japan witnessed mass protests against the 1951 US–Japan Security Treaty. The leader of the socialist camp, the USSR, was making every effort to lay the basis of a socialist economy in the region: its technicians were busy in the developing countries.

The regional status of the USSR in this period was first and foremost based on the strong military potential needed for global confrontation with the USA and later with China, as well as on the ideological attraction of socialist ideas for most regional states. US policy was primarily aimed at creating a buffer against the spread of communist ideology and was crowned by US participation in the Korean and Viet Nam wars.

With the defeat in Viet Nam, the USA perhaps for the first time in the post-war period faced the need to reconsider the ratio of its goals to its means in foreign policy. Having abandoned a messianic fight against world communism,

President Richard Nixon made for rapprochement with China. To the USA a step towards a major adversary, which would have been quite usual in 19th century European diplomacy, meant a breakthrough in foreign policy. China remained outwardly a far more aggressive and fanatical advocate of the communist ideology than the USSR. The USA's relations with regional allies, partners and friends were gradually shaping into complex interdependence, motivated by the US security provision for these countries on the one hand and extensive economic cooperation on the other. These two components generated actual interests which integrated the United States fully into the Asia-Pacific region. Naturally, relations were never free from problems and contradictions of a political, economic and social nature. The common denominator of all these problems was anti-Americanism, which was the negative side of the absence of alternatives to alliance with the USA.

By the end of the 1970s the USA had become a fully-fledged part of East Asia and a key player in or, sometimes, a leader of most political, economic, social and military developments in the region. The collapse of the Soviet-US détente further cemented the US position. As a result the value of US security provision and military-political partnership on the whole was considerably enhanced in the eyes of most regional states. With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Viet Nam's of Cambodia the old thesis about the particular belligerency of the USSR and its allies regained its hold. On the other hand the demise of détente finally fixed the place of China in US policies while providing a stable balance between their messianic and pragmatic components. Finally, the end of détente coincided with a boost of economic integration in East Asia. This last fact was a sheer bonus for the United States: the more the East Asian countries were interested in US military-political guarantees, the more eager they became to accommodate the USA's economic interests.

The USSR, unfortunately, lacked pragmatism in its relations with the states of the region and followed ideological priorities and partly strategic considerations rather than market logic and economic expediency—tactics which allowed it to make centralized, if not always efficient, use of its sizeable economic resources.

As a result the USSR and subsequently Russia found itself in full retreat in East Asia, having yielded its positions to the United States. The only element of the superpowers' regional antagonism which still holds for present-day Russia is the need to maintain a strategic nuclear balance with the United States. Having so far played a barely noticeable part in either the Asian countries' economies or their politics, Russia is not likely to make any progress in the foreseeable future. Regional leadership was yielded long before the demise of the USSR and the collapse of the socialist system as a result of fading socialist ideology, undermined by the Chinese-Soviet rivalry, and of the success of US policy in stimulating economic growth in the region. Without lengthy discussion of the dominance of Japanese or US capital, the leaders of the Asian states spared no effort to win foreign investment and stimulate exports. Being integrated with US industrial power, these countries have made outstanding progress, despite the economic crisis of 1997–98.

Security aspects

In Soviet times the security of East Asia and the Soviet far east in particular was viewed first and foremost through a military lens because of the Soviet-US and later Sino-Soviet confrontation. Vast Soviet forces were deployed in the region. About 50 divisions were stationed at the Chinese border, which cost the USSR \$100 billion in the prices of the 1980s during the period of confrontation with China.¹ Immense resources were funnelled into the reinforcement of the Pacific Fleet as a counterbalance to the US Seventh Fleet. In the mid-1980s the USSR had in the Pacific 120 submarines, including 24 nuclear-powered, ballistic-missile submarines (SSBNs), as compared to 51 US submarines (including 8 SSBNs) and 77 large surface ships as compared to 107 on the US side.²

Despite attempts to inculcate the concept of collective security in East Asia, the USSR had little success. Unlike Europe, where NATO and the Warsaw Pact countries were patently opposed, Asia hardly saw a clear-cut Soviet-US antagonism. The USA was little concerned at the number of Soviet tanks and ground divisions, while flatly refusing all Soviet initiatives for the reduction of naval arms in view of its own marked naval superiority over the USSR.

Present-day regional security, as seen by Euro-Asiatic Russia, is made up of the following aspects: (a) a policy oriented to both Europe and Asia, with its increasing economic and political potential; (b) Russia's own lasting territorial integrity; (c) a favourable climate for the development of the Russian far east and its further integration in the East Asian economic framework; (d) sustainable relations with the regional neighbours; and (e) in military terms unaltered regional goals—the maintenance of the strategic nuclear balance and the integrity of national borders.

The USA's regional interests are largely determined by the system of forward deployment, including strategic forces, as well as by its deep-rooted integration in the economic and political life of East Asia. The influence exerted by the United States over East Asia for the last third of the 20th century has come to dominate the political, military and economic life of the region.

The USA still retains the cold war framework of military-political treaties, which rests on the two main pillars of the US-Japan Security Treaty of 1951 and the US-South Korea Mutual Defense Treaty of 1953. Under these treaties 46 000 US servicemen are stationed in Japan and 38 000 in South Korea. In economic terms the US regional status is rooted in its almost \$1 trillion direct and portfolio investments and in East Asia's 40 per cent share of US exports, which provides 2-3 million US citizens with work. Exports to East Asia amount to 63.9 per cent of total exports by value for Oregon, 57.9 per cent for Alaska, 64.6 per cent for Hawaii, 51.9 per cent for California, 55.7 per cent for

¹ *Segodnya*, 25 Mar. 1997.

² International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1989-1990* (IISS: London, 1989), pp. 26, 42.

Nebraska, 68.8 per cent for New Mexico and 54.6 per cent for Washington State.³

The present-day position of Russia in the region is far less secure. For many years its foreign, economic and trade policy was oriented towards Europe: Siberia and the Russian far east were considered as a source of raw materials for the industry of the European part of the country. As a rule, even the goods produced in the Russian far east were used west of the Urals. Currently Russia, having only one-quarter of its territory in Europe, remains completely oriented to trade with the West. Trade with Asia is less than 20 per cent of its commodity circulation and trade with Asia-Pacific less than 10 per cent.⁴ In 1997 Russia's exports to Asia-Pacific amounted to \$9485 million or 10.8 per cent of the total and imports from the region only \$3730 million or 5.5 per cent of the total.⁵ The value of its imports from China in 1997 was one-quarter of that of 1993.⁶ Russia's share in the trade of the Asia-Pacific countries in the 1990s was consistently less than 1 per cent. In 1995 its share in the exports of Asia-Pacific was 0.4 per cent and of imports 0.8 per cent.⁷

The 1990s have seen Russia make every effort to normalize its relations with China and promote dialogue with Japan, but for all practical purposes it has very few allies in the region, while its foreign policy has neither a framework of treaties nor a firm economic footing to rest on. Regrettably, Russia's political successes lack appropriate economic backing. The relations of its president with the leaders of China and Japan tend to be mistaken for evidence of strategic partnership—a definition of interstate relations increasingly favoured by most politicians in Moscow. Russia is economically the weak side of the China–Japan–Russia–USA quadrangle, and the gap is widening dangerously.

Russia's influence on regional policy has shrunk markedly. However, it is still propped up by the status of nuclear heavyweight and the persisting super-power image. For the foreseeable future Russia is likely to play a minor role in regional security issues but to retain a certain political leverage: the United States, China and Japan will require Russia's assistance in their trilateral interaction.

In fact this is already happening. A new policy towards Russia declared by Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto in 1997 has been a remarkable spur to Japanese–Russian relations, in security matters as well as others.⁸ China and Russia have concluded a number of agreements cementing their relations.⁹ The United States maintains extensive ties with Russia. The whole situation is

³ Nanto, D., *The Asian Financial Crisis, the IMF and Japan: Economic Issues*, 17 Apr. 1998 (Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service: Washington, DC, 1998), p. 29.

⁴ *Rossiya v Tsifrah: Offitsialnaya Statistika, 1998* (Goskomstat: Moscow, 1998).

⁵ See note 4.

⁶ See note 4.

⁷ *Materialy Parlamentskikh Slyshanii: Problemy Kompleksnogo Razvitiya Regionov Vostochnoy Sibiri i Dalnego Vostoka v Protsesse Integratsii so Stranami Aziatsko-Tikhookeanskogo Regiona* [Report on the parliament hearings in 1997 in Irkutsk: the problems of complex development of eastern Siberia and the far east in the process of integration with Asia-Pacific countries] (ATP: Irkutsk, 1997), p. 38.

⁸ See also chapters 20 and 21 in this volume.

⁹ See also chapters 18 and 19 in this volume.

chiefly a reflection of US and Japanese apprehensions about the regional and global expansion of China, on the one hand, and China's attempts to capitalize on its partnership with Russia in its dialogue with the West, on the other.

Despite an obvious asymmetry between the Russian and US regional potentials, both political and economic, there are some regional security issues which might necessitate Russian–US cooperation or at least prompt mutual understanding. These issues are associated first and foremost with a settlement on the Korean Peninsula.

III. China: between Russia and the USA

The end of the 1990s saw China's transformation from being a political make-weight in the global Soviet–US antagonism into a fully independent and significant factor in global politics. In the 21st century both Russia and the United States are likely to direct their attention to China to the detriment of their concern with each other. Russian security is burdened with a more than 4000 km-long border with China, while the United States might eventually see China as an equal economic competitor and possibly as a threat to its own regional interests and those of its allies. In terms of security Russia and the United States view China from different angles but, while declaring willingness to promote relations with China, share a certain anxiety about their prospects.

China and Russia

The future of China affects Russia much more deeply than it affects the United States. Despite the fact that Russia's current introversion prevents it from concentrating on the present and the future of China and their mutual relations, there is steady progress in relations between the two. They have managed to overcome past contradictions and establish friendly relations. Over the seven-year period 1992–98 their leaders held six summit meetings and signed a number of important documents determining border security and the development of their relations. In April 1996 in Shanghai the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan signed the first Agreement on Confidence Building in Border Areas, and in April 1997 in Moscow the same countries signed the Treaty on Mutual Reduction of Military Forces in Border Areas.¹⁰ In November 1997 Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Chinese President Jiang Zemin declared the demarcation of the eastern part of their common border implemented.¹¹ China and Russia are making every effort to extend their economic ties and trade, which amounted to \$5.5 billion in 1998. This is equal to 1.7 per cent of China's trade and a slightly higher share of Russia's.¹²

¹⁰ Lachowski, Z., 'Conventional arms control', *SIPRI Yearbook 1997: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1997), p. 494; and Lachowski, Z., 'Conventional arms control', *SIPRI Yearbook 1998: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1998), p. 526–27. See also chapter 18, section II, in this volume.

¹¹ See chapter 18, section II, in this volume.

¹² Savenkov, Yu., 'Prezhde chem risovat derevo, pochuvstvuy kak ono raset' [Before painting the tree, sense how it grows], *Izvestiya*, 25 Feb. 1999.

The development of the arms transfer relationship with China aims to support Russia's defence industry and meet China's growing demand for sophisticated weapons. China is using its imports from Russia to modernize its armed forces. The list of weapons acquired from Russia is impressive. China has bought more than 100 S-300PMU-1 (Nato designation SA-10) surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), regarded as one of the most sophisticated anti-aircraft systems in the world, and 50 Su-27 (Flanker) multi-purpose, air-superiority fighter aircraft. It has acquired a licence to build Su-27s for between \$1.5 billion and \$2.2 billion and plans to build 200. Russia and Israel are reportedly helping China to develop its own J-10 fighter aircraft and have cooperated to sell China airborne early-warning and control (AEWAC) aircraft. China has also acquired Il-76M transport aircraft, vital for power projection, various air-to-air missiles, some of which can match the Taiwanese Air Force's arsenal, and transport helicopters. Russia has sold China two Kilo Class diesel-electric submarines, new versions of which are almost as quiet as the US Los Angeles Class attack submarine, Sovremenny Class destroyers and advanced ship-based missiles. Between 1991 and 1997 China spent about \$6 billion on purchases of Russian arms.¹³

The future of Sino-Russian relations is likely to depend on the evolution of domestic conditions in each country. Russia is currently trying to pull the democratic foundations laid in the early 1990s out of the fire of political and economic crisis. Even if democracy in Russia survives, its economy will need at least a decade to recover fully, and this is likely to reduce Russia's share in the regional economy. In the event of a communist relapse, relations between China and Russia are most unlikely to be based once again on ideology. The present-day communist opposition in Russia professes pure nationalism, which cannot but revive tensions between the two countries, and in terms of security views China through the prism of supposedly inevitable confrontation with the USA.

China might also become a factor for regional instability. Like Russia, it now faces the possibility of drastic changes. From 1990 to 1997 its gross national product (GNP) in 1993 \$PPP (purchasing power parity) terms increased from \$1765 billion to \$3670 billion and industrial production more than doubled, from \$550 billion to \$1330 billion.¹⁴ Provided this increase continues, China may soon become a fully-fledged economic competitor of the United States, with a comparatively poor population and swelling imports of fuel and food-stuffs, although the possibility remains of profound economic and social crisis in China with consequences that would be impossible to predict.

Neither China's development into a superpower nor its destabilization seems favourable for Russia. A full-scale crisis in China would be fraught with most unfortunate effects for Russia, including the possibility of confrontation. Any attempts to resolve the social crisis through ideological control over the economy, separatism or economic crisis will give rise to a totalitarian state and

¹³ Trubkin, I., 'Arms export: risky business', *Kommersant Daily*, 23 June 1997.

¹⁴ Bolotin, B., [International comparison: 1990-97], *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya*, no. 10 (1998), pp. 120, 124.

inevitably worsen relations with Russia. Even if the outcome for China is positive, Chinese and Russian geopolitical interests might remain at variance.

Because of China's increasing need for imports of fuel and foodstuffs, it will try to put sea communications under strict control and aim to reassert control over the disputed territories, which could make for an escalation of its confrontation with its southern neighbours,¹⁵ along with Japan and the USA, which are looking apprehensively at the measured tread of the Middle Kingdom.

An outbreak of controversy between China and Japan or the USA seems at present more likely than confrontation between China and Russia. However, this is not certain. Geopolitical pressure from China on the sparsely populated and barely governed regions of Siberia and the Russian far east is already in evidence and is liable to spiral upwards. The problem of 'creeping Chinese colonization'—the inconspicuous penetration and settlement of Chinese in Russia—will probably also develop. Sooner or later Russia will have to respond with severe restrictions which could trigger a crisis in bilateral relations.

Should the Asia-Pacific region be faced by the 'Chinese threat', the position of Russia will be determined by the state of its relations with the major regional countries.

Regardless of China's political zigzags, it is essential that Russian diplomatic efforts should focus on seeking the conditions for lasting, stable and mutually beneficial relations with a powerful neighbour, rather than playing geopolitical games. The possibility of confrontation can only be removed by the economic building up of Russia in general and the Russian far east in particular.

The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the next will be marked for China by continuing efforts to modernize its armed forces. As stated by Chinese Defence Minister Chi Haotian, 'China's military policy is underpinned by the "active defense" doctrine, which implies defense of both the mainland and the territorial waters'.¹⁶ The armed forces will be engaged depending on the international political climate and the evolution of the domestic situation. As regards the speed of China's military development, the existing notion that a country's prosperity and military might are closely interrelated objectives, which is embodied in the constitution of China as the 'welfare and power' of the state, should be kept in mind. Moreover, the People's Liberation Army has much leeway in technology to make up, and this prevents China from engaging in large-scale warfare.

Alliances and blocs have little attraction for China. In the immediate future it will probably retain an aversion to any kind of formal or virtual alliance. This is prompted by both the stinging memory of colonial and 'socialist' rule and down-to-earth reasons: China is too weak to have junior partners but too strong to be a junior partner itself.

¹⁵ For a summary of these disputes, see Swinnerton, R., 'The strategic environment and arms acquisitions in South-East Asia', eds B. Gill and J. N. Mak, *Arms, Transparency and Security in South-East Asia*, SIPRI Research Report no. 13 (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1997), p. 26.

¹⁶ *Nikkei Weekly*, 27 May 1996.

Russia's sights, however, are still levelled at a network of alliances and blocs. Nostalgic memories of the 'inviolable unity of the socialist countries' and of superpower status and a feeling of constant threat are inherent in the mentality of Russian politicians. When it comes to China this characteristic of the Russian political elite finds expression in a wide spectrum of opinions on the prospects of Sino-Russian relations.

The image of China in the Russian political conscience can be illustrated by two major tendencies.

On the one hand, the leaders of the two countries have upgraded their relations to 'strategic cooperation', which stands for a high level of ties.¹⁷ They have managed to clear the way for enhanced contacts and stable relations. On the other hand, there is residual enmity constantly fuelled by exaggerations of the present Chinese immigration to Russia and fears of potential Chinese territorial claims. Moreover, in the light of Russia's economic collapse, China's progress has provoked downright jealousy and an inferiority complex.

The negative side of the Russian political elite's image of China is chiefly associated with a multi-faceted hostility remaining in the Russian mass consciousness, which has always made a clear-cut division between Europeans and Asians. Despite vast experience of communal life with the Asians, the Russian people have not assimilated much of the Muslim, Confucian or Buddhist cultures. In the 1950s China was considered an ally, but an amicable attitude was underpinned by a feeling of Russian superiority. After that China was long regarded as an ideological opponent and, furthermore, pretender to vast Soviet territories in the far east and Central Asia. The propaganda portrait of China looked even more hostile than those of the capitalist countries, while China seemed to have betrayed the USSR after long years of brotherly help.

The Russian political elite's perception of China is the quintessence of the evolution of Russia's foreign policy and its painful switch from clear-cut totalitarian stereotypes to democratic confusion, not to say anarchy, complicated by a persisting wariness of the outside world in view of NATO's expansion and by the long-standing controversy between the supporters of a pro-Western and a Eurasian ideological orientation in Russia. Supporters of the first group defend the idea of a strong ideological, economic and even military alliance with the West. Former Russian Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar recommends 'cementing military alliance with the West and switching our deterrence potential to the Far East',¹⁸ which is reminiscent of Academician Andrey Sakharov's words that 'playing up the Chinese threat is an element of the political game'.¹⁹ Supporters of the Eurasian orientation, represented mainly by politicians of the left and ultra-left of the Russian political spectrum, are against close relations with the West and defend the idea of a special role for Russia in world history.

¹⁷ In Sep. 1994, at their summit meeting in Moscow, a Joint Declaration declared their relations to be based on 'constructive partnership'. In Apr. 1996, at a summit meeting in Beijing, Russia and China declared their 'interaction aimed at strategic partnership in the 21st century'. ITAR-TASS, 'Puls planety', 23 Nov. 1998.

¹⁸ *Izvestiya*, 12 Feb. 1997.

¹⁹ *Izvestiya*, 12 Feb. 1997.

Ideological antagonism to Western values does not, however, necessarily mean support for close relations with China. An article on ‘Military reform: an estimate of the threats to Russia’s national security’, prepared by the People’s Patriotic Union of Russia, reads: ‘Russia’s military policy towards China should be worked out circumspectly with regard to the fact that the USA, having included China on a list of probable enemies, is interested in provoking military confrontation between China and Russia’.²⁰ China, Japan and the United States were listed along with Germany as threats to Russian national security in the ‘National defence policy of the Russian Federation 1996–2000’, written in 1996 by the Security Council of the Russian Federation.²¹ The then Secretary of the Russian Defence Council, Yury Baturin, commented on the document, saying that ‘neither Russia nor the USA wants to see China as a dominant power in Asia. Japan would not welcome an overweight China either, which makes it our potential partner. This is a trump card to be put aside for the time of need’.²²

China and the USA

China is undergoing a largely introverted transformation, and its foreign policy is normally conditioned by domestic developments. Its traditional concentration on internal problems has been noted by a Russian historian, who believed the Chinese to be ‘extremely hard-working’ but incapable of performing an ‘exploit—an impressive, swingeing move, determined by external clashes’.²³ The point about China’s political introversion has a ring of truth, especially regarding its countless economic problems and its continuous effort to make the greatest possible use of the Western investment potential.

In this sense China is the opposite of the USSR—unfit for the vacant post of super-adversary of the USA. At the same time there are a number of difficult intersections between the Chinese and US foreign policies, while China’s transformation, regardless of the course it takes, is bound to affect US interests. Although the absence of a super-adversary has changed the USA’s superpower status, it remains a great power with interests all over the world.

This is why the United States is witnessing an unabated dispute about which strategy is applicable to China. There are three main positions. The first, supported by US sinologists, suggests involving China in all kinds of international relations as well as trade and economic and financial cooperation, both unlimited and unbiased, for instance, in ideological terms. Cumulatively this policy is expected to make China ‘play the game’ as a fully-fledged member of the international community. The second approach treats China as susceptible

²⁰ Zyuganov, G. (ed.), ‘Voyennaya reforma: otsenka ugroz natsionalnoy bezopasnosti Rossii’ [Military reform: an estimate of the threats to Russia’s national security], *Yadernoye Rasprostraneniye*, no. 19 (Sep. 1997), p. 48.

²¹ The document was not published.

²² *Kommersant Daily*, 23 Apr. 1996.

²³ Solovyev, V., ‘Nablyudeniya nad obshchestvennoy zhiznyu narodov’ [Observation of the social life of people], *Mysl* (Moscow), vol. 17 (1996), p. 17.

to force rather than argument. Logically, a country posing both real and potential threats will be viewed as an object of preventive containment. The purpose of this US 'game plan' is to block China's foreign policy ventures while shattering its quasi-Marxist dictatorship. Such drastic measures are expected to pressurize China into abiding by common rules. Among supporters of the 'containment' of China are influential Republicans. When President Bill Clinton proposed to Congress the appointment of a cross-party delegation to accompany him on an official visit to China in 1998, only Democrats accepted.²⁴ The Republicans are insisting that such problems as human rights and the security of Taiwan should have priority in US–Chinese relations. Commenting on Clinton's visit, Jim Nicholson, Chairman of the Republican National Committee, said that Clinton would 'walk on the blood of those brave pro-democracy protesters'.²⁵

The third attitude seems to be a synthesis of the other two. In practical terms it is reflected in Clinton's China policy. It recommends engaging China in international affairs, particularly in economic cooperation, while maintaining readiness to counter any hypothetical destabilizing moves.

Despite continuous pressure from Republican Congressmen who have criticized President Clinton's 'soft-spoken' approach to China, the US Administration is increasingly interested in extending ties with China. Present-day China plays a major part in the China–Russia–USA triangle. Wherever Russia fails to meet China's needs—in state-of-the-art technologies, credits or an export market—there is always the United States to rely on. At the same time Sino-Russian military cooperation, which provides the Chinese armed forces with relatively cheap yet up-to-date Russian arms, gives China formidable leverage against the USA. Both Russia and the United States are eager to step up relations with China at the expense of certain concessions to China, which is normally steadfast in its policies.

The USA's present China policy has undergone a long transformation through tentative measures to the synthetic approach just mentioned, which has been upgraded to conceptual directives. It was described by President Clinton during his 1998 visit to China: 'In dealing with China we must stay true to a course that is both principled and pragmatic. We must continue to expand our areas of cooperation, even as we deal directly with our differences'.²⁶ This policy is unlikely to introduce anything novel. It corresponds to the 'containment through integration' worked out by the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the end of World War II. It also resembles the policy of *détente* with the USSR at the beginning of the 1970s as initially viewed by the administration of President Richard Nixon. The critical factor is that, despite censuring human-rights abuses and evidence of other non-democratic practices in China,

²⁴ Remarks by Stanley O. Roth, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, US Department of State, 19 June 1998.

²⁵ Berke, R. L., 'GOP offers rare praise for Clinton's China performance', *New York Times International*, 3 July 1998.

²⁶ Radio address of the president to the nation, Beijing, 27 June 1998.

the United States seems unlikely to link them with its ties with China. In other words, it wishes to 'reward' China for attempts to liberalize its economy (provided China spares the US public any startling domestic experiments) yet feels reluctant to 'punish' it if it makes no such attempts. The emphasis is on foreign policy. That is where China is expected to demonstrate balanced and responsible behaviour, renounce the use of force and nuclear proliferation, and so on. It is likewise essential that China provide transparency in its defence programmes and free access to its domestic market for US goods and investment.

US-Chinese security relations are closely interwoven with their economic ties. The restraint currently seen in the US attitude towards such thorny questions as human rights or China's policy on the export of military technologies is associated with efforts to keep the vast Chinese market accessible to the United States. With the crisis in the Taiwan Strait in 1996 both sides exchanged threats of economic sanctions, which after joint discussions were not carried out.

Despite congressional demands that China be punished for its violations of human rights, the US Administration has insisted on the preservation of most-favoured-nation status for China. China has joined the main international nuclear arms control agreements,²⁷ promised to stop the export of missiles and nuclear technologies and begun to 'actively study joining the MTCR [Missile Technology Control Regime]'.²⁸ The final decision to join the MTCR depends on the USA stopping arms exports to Taiwan. During President Clinton's state visit to China in June 1998 both sides condemned the nuclear tests of May 1998 by India and Pakistan, declaring that the tests would not win them membership in the world 'nuclear club'.²⁹

In general the USA's policy on China looks today fairly stable, consistent and effective. This was confirmed by President Clinton's June 1998 visit. Both parties confirmed their willingness not to concentrate on their serious contradictions but to base their relations on mutual interests. This reflects US (as well as Chinese) pragmatism and freedom from any kind of ideology. It illustrates the new US conceptual approach to foreign policy.

The security framework

On the whole, the present triangular framework Russia-China-USA (or a broader quadrangular framework of Russia-China-USA-Japan) rests on a far more balanced foundation than the logic of the 'zero-sum game' of the past. For instance, Russia has no serious reason to regard the improvement of relations between China, Japan and the USA as a priori threatening to its own interests. Accordingly the United States and Japan can hardly feel apprehensive about the expanding relationship between China and Russia. This dramatic change in

²⁷ China is a party to the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).

²⁸ White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 'Achievements of the US-China summit', Fact sheet, Beijing, 27 June 1998.

²⁹ 'China, US criticize South Asia nuclear tests', *Los Angeles Times*, 27 June 1998, p. 1.

strategic thinking can be explained by two reasons. First, Russia and the United States have renounced their global competition and therefore made the 'triangular diplomacy' of US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger of the late 1960s obsolete. Second, it is essential that Russia, the USA and the rest of the world seem to have given up the idea of playing the 'China card'. China has produced convincing arguments that it wields enough power, will and good sense to avoid being a card in anyone's hands. To say that China is free to determine the limits of its relations with any other state is no exaggeration.

These facts prompt the following deduction. Since there is a possibility that China, because of its inherent problems, may trigger instability in Asia-Pacific, other major powers have a common interest in not pushing this possibility to the brink of reality, willingly or unwillingly, directly or indirectly. No other power will benefit from instability caused by China. All stand to gain from a stable and confident China gradually solving its dilemmas and contradictions. In this sense Japan and the USA should welcome the progress of Sino-Russian relations just as Russia should be confident enough to approve of the US-Chinese and Japanese-Chinese rapprochement.

IV. Japan remains with the USA

During the cold war the *raison d'être* for the US-Japanese Security Treaty was the Soviet threat, which almost completely disappeared with the disintegration of the USSR, the new political orientation of Russia and its sharp economic decline. Despite that, the military-political alliance is being preserved and will continue for a number of reasons.

First, the security treaty suits both parties. Japan, although it has the second largest military budget in the world after the USA, still spends on defence no more than 1 per cent of its GNP and keeps a military potential comparable with Turkey's.³⁰ It is under the US defence umbrella, but while the USA bears responsibility for the defence of Japan, Japan does not participate in the defence of the USA. Without the USSR as the main enemy, both Japan and the USA act on the basis of: (a) a hypothetical deterioration of relations with Russia, which still keeps a powerful military potential in its far east; and (b) the unpredictability of future relations with China, which is actively modernizing its armed forces. Japan remains the key ally and main economic partner of the USA in the region. The frameworks and parameters of their interaction are determined in principle and in the foreseeable future will extend rather than be reduced. Close military-political cooperation with Japan gives the USA strong leverage in resolving bilateral economic problems. The present US influence is far from absolute and often collides with strong Japanese resistance, but it is still fairly effective.

³⁰ See, e.g., International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1998/99* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1998), pp. 67-69, 183-85.

Finally, the stability of US policy towards Japan is based on a complex of psychological and political circumstances, among which are the attachment, based among other things on the inertia of perceptions, to an old friend and ally, and the existence of a large and influential Japanese lobby in the USA.

For Japan itself, its close relations with the USA are the cornerstone of its foreign policy. Japan feels comfortable as a junior partner of the USA. It is significant that the end of cold war persuaded Japan not to a debate about the necessity and vitality of the alliance with the USA but to the immediate confirmation of its actuality for the security of the country. Strictly speaking, the reasons for Japan's concerns are fairly obvious. Twice in this century, in 1918 and in 1945, the USA came to the conclusion that radical changes in the international situation allowed it to keep a distance from the problems of security in remote regions. The dissolution of the USSR has not produced a similar effect but has created in East Asia an essentially new balance of military and non-military problems and an accent on non-military threats to regional security.

The end of the cold war and the disintegration of the USSR substantially reduced the fears of a Soviet military threat on which Japanese military doctrine was based and required a new concept of security in the region. This was reflected in the US-Japan Joint Declaration on Security signed by Clinton and Hashimoto in April 1996, which confirmed the role of the security treaty in the maintenance of peace and stability in the region. In September 1997 Japan and the USA adopted the revised Guidelines for US-Japan Defense Cooperation which replaced the similar document of 1978.³¹

The two first sections of the guidelines, regarding 'cooperation under normal circumstances' (what the 1978 document referred to as 'cooperation on containment of aggression' and 'actions in response to an armed attack against Japan'), were basically not changed. The third section, on 'cooperation in situations in areas surrounding Japan that will have an important influence on Japan's peace and security', was absent from the previous document. The 1997 document stated that the concept 'situations in areas surrounding Japan' is not geographic but situational. The frameworks of cooperation between the two countries in the event of such a situation occurring were outlined in limits of operations, relief activities, measures to deal with refugees, search and rescue operations, non-combatant evacuation operations and 'activities for ensuring the effectiveness of economic sanctions for the maintenance of international peace and stability'. Japan will, in case of need, provide additional facilities and areas for US forces involved in such operations in accordance with the security treaty and its related arrangements. If necessary for effective and efficient operations, US forces and the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) will make joint use of SDF and US facilities and areas in accordance with the treaty and its related arrangements and coordinate operations, intelligence activities and logistics support 'as distinguished from areas where combat operations are

³¹ For the text, see US Department of Defense, News release, no. 507-97 (23 Sep. 1997), URL <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Sep1997/b09231997_bt50797b.html>.

being conducted'. The document also stressed that Japan will conduct all its actions 'within the limitations of its constitution and in accordance with such basic positions as the maintenance of its exclusively defense-oriented policy and its three non-nuclear principles'.³²

Although the document did not mention the Korean Peninsula or Taiwan as a sphere of joint action, the statements of Japanese officials confirming their readiness to expand the frameworks of the treaty to these two areas caused a sharply negative reaction in China and North Korea, and were not much welcomed in Seoul. Japan was immediately accused of militarism and of an aggressive policy. This was not only a reaction to Japan's rather timid attempt to expand the framework of possible interaction between itself and the USA, but preventive action against a possible activation of Japanese regional policy.

For China the expansion of US–Japanese cooperation beyond Japan's national borders meant a reaction to China's obvious drive for superpower status. It was noted that even in the 1978 guidelines, which had an obvious anti-Soviet character, nothing was said about expansion of this cooperation, which from the Chinese point of view meant that the 'Chinese threat' was considered more important than the Soviet threat had been. The appearance of the guidelines not long after the crisis in the Taiwan Strait intensified China's fears. Its pained reaction, which was even more acute than its reaction to the US demonstration of its military strength in the Taiwan Strait, reflected the fact that China considers the prospect of Japanese military independence more dangerous than the US military presence in the region. It is connected above all with the Chinese historical experience and the ambiguity of Japan's military build-up.

However, the modernization of the US–Japanese alliance has to contend with many problems. In East Asia there is no multilateral allied structure like NATO. US involvement in the maintenance of security in this region is realized through bilateral treaties and agreements. Rumours that the bilateral agreements are to be transformed into some form of collective security system are exaggerated in the view of many observers and have nothing to do with reality. Even the closest US allies, Japan and South Korea, for well-known reasons are not ready for multilateral military cooperation. Furthermore, Japanese participation in any collective defence system is limited by its constitution.³³

For Russia the existence of the security treaty does not represent a threat to security, in spite of its supposed resistance to the idea of foreign military blocs, nor does the Japanese military potential. It has an obvious defensive character without any serious possibilities for force projection. It is difficult to imagine Japan using force to solve its territorial dispute with Russia. In their dispute over the Senkaku (Dyaojuidao) Islands China and Japan are claiming uninhabited territories; the southern Kuril Islands, however, are de facto Russian territory and are under the protection of the Russian armed forces. If in the

³² US Department of Defense, 'Completion of the review of the guidelines for US–Japan defense cooperation', 23 Sep. 1997, URL <<http://www.defenselink.mil>>.

³³ See, e.g., Takahara, T., 'Japan', ed. T. Findlay, *Challenges for the New Peacekeepers*, SIPRI Research Report no. 12 (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1996), pp. 53–56, 67.

Sino-Japanese territorial conflict extremist actions aimed at undermining the status quo could provoke competitive demonstrations of strength and even possibly local conflicts, any use of force in the Russian-Japanese conflict will be regarded as a violation of Russian sovereignty, with all that that entails.

A direct clash between Russian and Japanese armed forces is possible in two hypothetical situations: (a) if Russia invades Japan or attacks Japanese ships in international waters; or (b) in the event of global conflict between Russia and the USA. At present both scenarios are extremely remote possibilities. It would not be proper to say that China has replaced the USSR in the list of potential threats to Japan, but its military alliance and military build-up are more and more often justified by the potential Chinese threat to Japanese national and regional interests. The Japanese and US shared perception of China as a rising superpower not only strengthens their alliance but also persuades Japan to be more flexible in its relations with Russia.

In 1997 Japan declared a new approach to its relations with Russia based on the principles of confidence, mutual benefit and long-term prospects. The two countries' leaders had two informal meetings in 1997 and 1998 and President Yeltsin promised 'to make all efforts to sign a peace treaty with Japan before the year 2000'.³⁴ Japan interprets this as meaning that the territorial dispute between them will be resolved before that date. Analysis of the Russian domestic situation, however, clearly shows that Yeltsin, at least for the foreseeable future, is not in a position to solve this complex problem. It is clear that the stalemate on this sensitive issue will seriously hamper bilateral relations and demonstrates that an informal pattern of meetings is not necessarily a substitute for regular diplomacy.³⁵

V. A Korean settlement: one purpose, two approaches

In their approach to security on the Korean Peninsula the interests of Russia and the USA largely coincide. Neither is interested in the conflict between North and South Korea. Other regional conflicts, among them the territorial disputes between Russia and Japan over the southern Kuril Islands, between Japan and South Korea over the Takeshima (Tokto) Islands, between Japan and China over the Senkaku Islands, or between China and South-East Asian countries in the South China Sea,³⁶ do not directly or essentially influence the security of Russia. For the USA, however, which has forces deployed in South Korea, there is a direct threat to national security. At the same time Russia and the USA have quite different possibilities for implementing their respective policies in the subregion.

Russia has lost practically all opportunity of interaction with North Korea. Glasnost and democracy produced broad criticism of the North Korean leader-

³⁴ *Diplomaticheskii Vestnik*, Dec. 1997, p. 14.

³⁵ On Japan's Russia policy, see also chapters 20 and 21 in this volume.

³⁶ See note 15.

ship in the Soviet and then Russian media and this brought their already very complicated relations to the verge of breakdown. Military–technical cooperation almost stopped and the volume of Russia’s imports from North Korea fell from \$44 million in 1994 to \$17 million in 1997.³⁷

With the beginning of the Soviet–Chinese confrontation in the 1960s, North Korea proclaimed itself neutral and the United States ceased to consider it as an obedient ally of any of the conflicting parties. On the surface this did not result in any change in US policy: it was still aimed at the prevention of communist aggression from the North. However, this hypothetical aggression began to be perceived not as function of Soviet expansionism and a threat of geopolitical communist aggression but as a local conflict with unpredictable consequences. Gradually the ideological element of struggle with communism retreated to the background of US policy. The main goal of policy on the Korean Peninsula was seen to be practical measures aimed at the containment of North Korea.

It must be said that in Korea more than anywhere else US policy has contributed to stability. The US military presence and in a broader context US–South Korean military cooperation have played a decisive role in preventing a new war on the Korean Peninsula, although at the same time they have preserved a high level of tension.

Without the economic help of the USSR and with cuts in economic support from China, the North Korean economy quickly declined and the probability of apocalyptic scenarios of regime collapse or military adventures in the context of a regime collapse increased. These scenarios were never realized, but the policy of North Korea became more and more dangerous than before. It began intensive work to build nuclear arms of its own and in 1993 announced its non-compliance with its obligations under the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty.³⁸ At the same time it announced that it would not sign the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention.

Not without the influence of China and Russia, the USA has realized the ineffectiveness of economic sanctions in a country already living in de facto isolation from the outside world. In favour of North Korea there was also the fact that, despite tensions in its relations with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and its complete rejection of the dialogue initiated with the South,³⁹ North Korea always emphasized its eagerness to talk directly with the USA. In October 1994 North Korea and the USA signed an Agreed Framework which halted the operation of North Korea’s research reactor and plutonium reprocessing plant in return for the setting up of an international consortium, the

³⁷ See note 5. In 1996, the work of the Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Science and Technology Cooperation was resumed, its session taking place in Pyongyang at the level of Deputy Chairmen of the government. This session gave no real results. The problem is that Russia has neither the possibility nor sufficient political reason to supply against credit and North Korea has neither the currency reserves to pay in hard currency nor the export goods to pay by barter.

³⁸ Simpson, J., ‘Nuclear arms control and an extended non-proliferation regime’, *SIPRI Yearbook 1994* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1994), p. 610.

³⁹ See, e.g., Gill, B., ‘The divided nations of China and Korea: discord and dialogue’, *SIPRI Yearbook 1996: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1996), pp. 134–44.

Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), to provide North Korea with two 1000-MW light water reactors and compensatory oil supplies.⁴⁰ The Agreed Framework is working, although with some serious difficulties, and is the main lever of US influence on North Korea.

However, North Korea began a new round of blackmail. On 31 August 1998 it launched a ballistic missile, formally in celebration of its 50th anniversary but in fact as a demonstration of its missile achievements. The missile had a range of 5000 km and would be capable of threatening Japan. The launch triggered fears of a new round of proliferation in Asia, given North Korea's sales of missiles to Iran, Pakistan and Syria. It also indicates that North Korea has the capability to build missiles that can travel greater distances. It is clear that one of its basic purposes in launching the missile (or, as it claims launching a satellite) was to bargain for hundreds of millions of dollars from the United States. The South Korean Ministry of Unification stated that members of a US congressional delegation were told during a visit to Pyongyang in August 1998 that the North would stop exporting missiles in exchange for \$500 million a year from the United States.⁴¹ The US-Russian agreement on mutual notification of missile launches by third countries, reached during President Clinton's visit to Moscow in September 1998, was directly inspired by the North Korean tests.

One of the key problems in the way of a Korean settlement remains replacement of the 1953 ceasefire agreement by a new system for the maintenance of peace and stability. In February 1996 North Korea proposed a bilateral provisional agreement with the USA as a substitute for a full-scale US-North Korean peace treaty. In response to that, in April 1996 South Korea and the USA proposed to start negotiations based on the formula 'two plus two' (with the participation of China and South Korea) aimed at the creation of a new security system on the peninsula.

As a next-door country Russia has a legitimate concern about the situation on the Korean Peninsula. As the successor to the USSR, which was at the root of the Korean conflict, Russia has accumulated great experience of dealing with North Korea and still keeps wide channels of communication with Pyongyang open while also developing good cooperation with Seoul. Russia is also a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. It is therefore entitled to an equal say with other concerned countries on the Korean issue. In 1993 Russia proposed a conference on North-East Asian security issues, with the participation of all the parties concerned, and currently speaks of discussing these issues within the framework of the ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) Regional Forum (ARF).⁴²

Russia criticized the US-South Korean proposal in the spring of 1996 for four-party talks as politically improper and legally groundless. It is usually

⁴⁰ Gill (note 39), pp. 136-38.

⁴¹ Kirk, D., 'North Korean refrain: up in the sky it's a tuneful satellite', *International Herald Tribune*, 5 Sep. 1998 (international edn).

⁴² For the membership of ASEAN and the ARF, see appendix 1 in this volume.

argued that the four-party format logically derives from the fact that the principal subject to be discussed is an agreement to succeed the ceasefire agreement of 1953 and that the talks should be limited to the countries which fought in the Korean War and signed the ceasefire—China, the two Koreas and the USA. However, this is legally flawed. The ceasefire was in fact signed by the top field commanders of the UN forces and the joint forces of North Korea and Chinese volunteers. Under international law neither China, the USA nor either of the two Koreas is therefore a party. (South Korea initially even declined to recognize it.) Moreover, because the ceasefire was signed on behalf of the UN, the new treaty should theoretically be authorized by the Security Council. How this is to be done if Russia's interests as a near neighbour are not taken into account, while it has a veto in the Security Council, is another major question.

The main argument against the four-party format is that a future-oriented document promising peace on the Korean Peninsula should not derive from past formulae. It remains to be seen whether the talks are successful. Russia will welcome positive results when they are submitted to the UN Security Council for consideration and approval. This approval will be essential since the foreign troops stationed in South Korea still use the UN mandate. As for Russia, it will continue to emphasize its proposal for a conference on North-East Asian security issues either as a substitute for or as a follow-up to the four-party talks.

At the cost of great effort, the USA persuaded North Korea to accept four-party talks. Two rounds were held in December 1997 and March 1998, without tangible result. North Korea still insists on a direct agreement with the USA. The four-party format for negotiations is able to smooth over this contradiction, but only until the time comes for final decisions. If that stage is reached, the USA will face two mutually exclusive alternatives—between accepting direct agreement with North Korea and offending its South Korean ally.

In general it is obvious that the USA is preparing for the reunification of Korea and trying to exclude any possibility of conflict flaring up. On the other hand, when and if reunification takes place, the situation on the Korean Peninsula will be quite different. South Korea will take on the heavy burden of the absorption of the North and will need to re-evaluate its strategic priorities. How that will affect Russia and the USA, especially the legitimate aspects of its military presence in Korea and the influence of that on Russia, is still not clear.

VI. Conclusions

Russian–US relations in the Pacific area are an indispensable part of their bilateral relations. Russia is not as strong as the USSR was, but elements of mutual deterrence for good or for bad are still a substantial part of international relations. Although the Pacific area is far from all the troubles of NATO expansion, events in Europe could lead to military confrontation between these two mighty military machines.

The major difference between the European and Pacific regions is that in the Pacific area naval forces play a much more important role than in other theatres. While China, the two Koreas and Russia have quite impressive ground forces there, sea-based forces have a decisive, if not dominant, position in the northern Pacific. So far Russia and the USA are the only countries which can confront each other on the open seas. Even after implementation of the START I and START II treaties,⁴³ the Pacific will still have an important role in the diminishing but still very dangerous nuclear confrontation.

In comparison even with the very recent past, Russia's diminishing participation in regional affairs has excluded it from the political scene in this part of the world. Its position is only taken into consideration when the problem of possible nuclear confrontation is being considered. The United States is and will remain in the foreseeable future the only nation controlling the blue waters of the entire Pacific. This allows it to dominate practically all sea traffic and, if it deems it necessary, to deny it to other nations. It also has substantial capabilities to attack land targets and implement large-scale landing operations on the Asian side of the Pacific. This capability is supported by its forward defences in Japan and Korea and a network of bases in the region. The US naval presence in the Pacific not only is aimed against the Russian Navy but also guarantees the security of US economic and political interests, including preventing Japan from achieving military independence and China from achieving its ambitions for regional leadership.

Russia's possibilities in the region are much more modest. The main task of the Russian Pacific Fleet is still the maintenance of the strategic balance with the USA and the protection of coastal and territorial waters, including the exclusive economic zone.

It is clear that hostilities between Russia and the USA can emerge only as part of a global deterioration of relations between them. In the Pacific area the most likely cause of such a deterioration would be some drastic change in relations between China and Russia. If Russia came under strong pressure in the West and some kind of consensus about NATO expansion could not be found, Russia would redouble its efforts to seek Chinese friendship and military cooperation. After the Russian Defence Minister, Igor Sergeev, visited China in November 1998, Colonel-General Yury Baluevskiy, Head of the Chief Operational Directorate of the Main Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, stated that 'the strategic policy of Russia towards China is the strengthening of military cooperation and reaching a situation when China should become our strategic partner, supporting Russia's positions not only in the East but also in the West'.⁴⁴

A serious crisis in Russian-US relations could revive Russian aspirations to establish closer relations with China, but China is not responsive to this.

⁴³ The 1991 Treaty on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms between the USSR and the USA; and the 1993 Treaty on Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms between Russia and the USA. The former is in force.

⁴⁴ ITAR-TASS, 'Puls planety', 5 Nov. 1998, p. AK-3.

Despite its disagreements with US policies, its political and economic relations with the USA are more important for China than the prospect of an alliance with a troubled and weakened Russia.

A confrontation between China and the USA would present Russia with a serious dilemma. Support for one of the two parties would mean a deterioration of relations with the other. Speculation about the reasons for possible conflict between China and the USA is premature and unreliable, but it can already be said that the best position for Russia would be neutrality. It is also possible to predict that if relations between Russia and the USA deteriorate China will take all necessary steps to remain neutral.