
29. Asia as a factor in Russia's international posture

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I. Introduction

Relations with Asian countries were always considered to be one of the highest priorities in Soviet and then Russian foreign policy. However, the role of Asia for Soviet/Russian national interests and national security was perceived differently in Moscow at different stages of Russia's national development, depending on concrete domestic conditions and the prevailing trends in the international environment. These changes in perception have been reflected in successive Soviet and then Russian Asian foreign policy and security initiatives or doctrines over the past few decades.

At the end of the 1960s the then Soviet General Secretary, Leonid Brezhnev, put forward his proposal to create a system of collective security in Asia with a view not only to counterbalancing the growing US political influence in this part of the world but also to building up an anti-Chinese alliance as an effective multilateral arrangement against what was seen in Moscow at the time as aggressive Chinese expansionism. It was little surprise that in the majority of Asian capitals this met with a very cool response since Asian governments did not want their countries to be unduly involved in the global Soviet–US or in the regional Soviet–Chinese confrontations.

In the mid-1980s the new Soviet leadership under Mikhail Gorbachev replaced this Asian security doctrine, based on the cold war philosophy, with one that attempted to overcome the existing deep ideological and political divisions between the Asian and Asia–Pacific countries and to achieve an overall improvement of the international climate in this part of the world. For this purpose Gorbachev proposed to use not only the Asian experience of peacemaking, still limited at that time, but also that accumulated in Europe and realized in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act.¹

The response of the Asian and Asia–Pacific countries to this Soviet proposal, especially on the use of the European experience, was largely negative. Their main arguments against it were that the European experience could not be used in Asia and Asia–Pacific because here there were many more differences in politics, culture, tradition and religion than in Europe, because there were many

¹ *Peace and Security for the Asian–Pacific Ocean Region: Speech by Mikhail Gorbachev in Vladivostok, 28 July 1986* (Novosti Press Agency Publishing House: Moscow, 1986), p. 27. See also Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, Final Act, Helsinki, 1975, URL <<http://www.osce.org/indexe-da.htm>>.

more unresolved territorial disputes, because, in contrast to Europe, Asia and Asia–Pacific were not divided between two opposing military blocs with clearly defined spheres of responsibility, and for other reasons. No doubt all these considerations were relevant, but probably the more fundamental reason for the Asian countries' rejection of the Soviet proposals was deep-seated suspicion about the motives behind them.

After the Soviet Union ceased to exist at the end of 1991, the foreign policy of a new Russia had to be formulated anew, including its policy on Asia. In the initial period, in the early 1990s, the foreign policy makers, led by Russia's first Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, paid very little attention to Asian affairs and almost everywhere in Asia receded into the background. As a result not only were ties with former Soviet ideological, political and military allies such as Viet Nam or North Korea both changed in substance and severely curtailed in scope and intensity, but even relations with India, a major political and trade partner in Asia since the mid-1950s, went into decline. Scant attention was paid at that time even to relations with the former Soviet Central Asian republics, and in the long run this damaged their relations with Moscow.

Instead, Russian foreign policy at that time took on a strong pro-Western tilt and a clearly idealistic goal of building a strategic partnership with former Soviet enemies was pursued. In practice, however, Russia was quickly reduced to the role of a junior partner to the West, even on major international issues. This policy endangered vital Russian national interests and was increasingly losing domestic support. Because of this and because of the obvious and growing asymmetry between Russian and US interests on a number of major international issues, in particular the situation developing in the post-Soviet space, the 'romantic period' or 'honeymoon' in US–Russian relations did not last long and was finally over by the mid-1990s.

These important changes, both domestic and international, necessitated a more assertive policy in Asia, the setting of clear goals and the formulation of methods for achieving them. In response to this an attempt was made to work out a new policy doctrine for Asia, its main principles being: (a) that no contradictions with any country in the region were irreconcilable and that Russia should work consistently towards stable and balanced relations with all of them; (b) that the development of economic relations with the regional countries was a main priority; and (c) that the response to challenges to regional security should be made on a collective, coordinated basis.

Elaborating on this last principle, Kozyrev spoke in favour of creating a collective or cooperative security system, a 'security community' open for every regional country to join. Such a community could be established, he believed, stage by stage with due consideration to concrete conditions in the different subregions of the Asia–Pacific area and taking into account the bilateral and multilateral security arrangements already existing there, starting with relatively simple forms of security cooperation (exchange of information, adoption of confidence-building measures (CBMs) and so on) and proceeding to more complex ones (such as joint resolution of conflicts). For these purposes Kozyrev

proposed to establish an Asia–Pacific centre for conflict prevention and an Asia–Pacific research institute on security problems.²

His proposals failed to raise any favourable interest and were largely ignored, partly because China, the largest power on the Asian continent, had made it known long ago that it was strongly opposed to any formal multilateral security schemes in this part of the world and would stay away from them. Kozyrev's proposals were also found impractical by those Asian countries, such as Japan and South Korea, which preferred to rely on the established and well-tested bilateral arrangements with the USA in protecting their national security.

In the same way Kozyrev's proposals on conflict prevention either failed to take into account or underestimated concrete realities that already existed or were quickly developing in Asia–Pacific security affairs. The most important of these by now were the regular multilateral consultations on regional political and security affairs held originally in the form of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) annual Post-Ministerial Conferences (PMCs) and from 1993 the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).³ For all practical purposes they were already providing a convenient venue for preventive diplomacy in Asia–Pacific and came to be accepted as such not only by the traditional ASEAN 'dialogue partners' but also by other regional countries and even by extra-regional countries, including India and the members of the European Union.

Although according to the Russian Constitution the main lines of foreign policy are formulated by the president himself, it was Kozyrev who in the eyes of public opinion was directly responsible for Russia's loss of prestige in international affairs. His dismissal in January 1996 was therefore widely welcomed. Yevgeny Primakov, who replaced Kozyrev as foreign minister (and less than two years after that, in September 1998, became prime minister), responded to the prevailing mood in Russian society by introducing profound changes. A new concept of Russian foreign policy and national security in international affairs was formulated with his active participation, which included three basic principles: (a) multipolarity as a governing principle of international relations and active opposition to attempts to establish a unipolar world order; (b) constructive partnership with all countries instead of 'mobile' or permanent coalitions; and (c) integration on a voluntary basis within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).⁴

An important part of the new foreign policy doctrine was the need to restore and develop relations with Asian countries, not as a counterbalance to the West, as it was sometimes represented by Primakov's critics both at home and abroad, but above all as a means to pursue concrete national political, security and economic goals in Asia itself and as a valuable tool to promote and defend Russia's larger national interests.

² Kozyrev, A., 'U Rossii net neprimirimykh protivorechii so stranami ATR' [Russia does not have any irreconcilable differences with Asia–Pacific states], *Segodnya*, 4 Feb. 1994.

³ For the memberships of ASEAN and the ARF, see appendix 1 in this volume.

⁴ 'Konseptsiya natsionalnoy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii' [The national security concept of the Russian Federation], *Diplomaticheskii Vestnik*, no. 2 (Feb. 1998), pp. 3–18.

II. Relations with CIS states in Asia

Within the framework of the new Russian foreign policy doctrine special attention was paid to the development of close relations with the former Soviet republics of Central Asia. Primakov's first foreign visit after becoming foreign minister was to Central Asia. He emphasized on several occasions on that visit that relations with the CIS member states in general and with those in Central Asia in particular would be the highest priority of Russian foreign policy. His statements were in consonance with the earlier (September 1995) presidential edict, 'Russia's strategic course with respect to the CIS member states', which stated that these relations were the top priority for Russia because its 'life interests in economy, security and defence are concentrated in the CIS territory'.⁵ This crystallization of the Russian attitude towards the former Soviet republics was motivated by the existence of a wide range of long-standing economic, cultural and family relations with them as well as by the role accorded to them by Moscow in its defence policy.

In dealing with the Central Asian states, Russia formulated two goals as its major priorities—closer economic cooperation and stronger security ties with these countries. To achieve these goals it declared its intention to act on both the bilateral and the multilateral levels, in the latter case primarily within the framework of the CIS. However, by the time Russia had managed to formulate its version of the Monroe Doctrine towards Central Asia, the political, economic and security situation in this region had undergone fundamental changes. The political vacuum created there after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the initial loss of Russian interest in the region was filled by the active penetration there of China, Iran, Turkey and the USA. Moreover, Russia's economic policy in Central Asia continued to lack substance, in spite of numerous declarations to the contrary, and failed to arrest the decline in the scope and volume of its business relations with the regional states.

For their part the five new Central Asian states, having by then achieved a fair degree of maturity in their statehood, had succeeded in formulating their national foreign policies with their specific goals and priorities. This and their deep resentment of the initial Russian neglect of Central Asia resulted, among other things, in a substantial reduction of Russian influence in the countries of the region. They were also losing interest in the CIS, whose record was highly discouraging in practically all major areas, including military cooperation. In spite of numerous declarations and agreed documents, only limited results were achieved by the CIS member states (including the Central Asian countries) in creating a joint system of air defence, in collective protection of their borders or in peacekeeping operations, while they failed to create an effective mechanism for implementing collective decisions on security issues or to draft programmes of military–technical and military–economic cooperation. Moreover, some of the Central Asian states, most notably Uzbekistan, were increasingly opposed to

⁵ *Segodnya*, 22 Sep. 1995, p. 9.

any further development or deepening of collective defence, denouncing it as plans to turn the CIS into a military–political ‘club’.⁶

A clear exception to this downward trend in collective security in Central Asia was the continuing Russian military presence in Tajikistan, where it was welcomed as the only real force able to defend the border with Afghanistan. Russian–Central Asian political and security cooperation began to improve following the military successes of the Taleban movement in Afghanistan, which were perceived as a prelude to a possible spillover of Islamic extremism onto their soil not only in neighbouring Tajikistan and Uzbekistan but also in Kazakhstan. In May 1998 a union of Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan was declared with the aim of preventing the spread of Islamic fundamentalism and extremism onto the territory of Central Asia from Afghanistan.⁷ Tajikistan called on the signatories to the 1992 Tashkent Treaty of Collective Security, and Russia in particular, to take all necessary measures to protect the southern borders of the Commonwealth.⁸ Russia responded to these requests by increasing the combat readiness of its troops in Tajikistan. In October 1998 the Russian, Tajik and Uzbek presidents signed another trilateral agreement promising mutual assistance in the event of one of their countries being seriously threatened by militant Islamic forces.⁹

This tendency towards enhanced cooperation on political and security matters was set back again in November 1998 when there was an armed revolt in Khujand, a major city in the north of Tajikistan, staged from the territory of Uzbekistan.¹⁰ Tajikistan accused Uzbekistan of supporting the revolt and, in spite of official denials by the latter of even indirect support, relations between the two countries became highly strained. As a result multilateral defence cooperation in Central Asia between the CIS countries was seriously undermined.¹¹ However, events in Khujand could be a blessing in disguise for Russian strategic interests in Central Asia. Not only did they increase the suspicions and fears of other regional states about Uzbekistan’s designs to become a regional power in Central Asia; they also increased the reliance of Tajikistan on the Russian military presence and so boosted the central role of Russia in regional security affairs that Uzbekistan even accused Russia of staging it intentionally.¹²

⁶ ‘Uzbekistan: More on Uzbek President’s remarks on CIS problems, tasks’, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report–Central Eurasia (FBIS–SOV)*, FBIS–SOV–98–111, 21 Apr. 1998.

⁷ Konstantinova, N., ‘Rossiya, Uzbekistan i Tadjikistan obyedinyautsa v politicheskuyu troiku’ [Russia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan unite in a political troika], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 7 May 1998.

⁸ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *RFE/RL Newslines*, vol. 2, no. 154, Part 1 (12 Apr. 1998).

⁹ *RFE/RL Newslines*, vol. 2, no. 197, Part 1 (12 Oct. 1998).

¹⁰ See also Zviagelskaya, I., ‘The Tajikistan conflict’, *SIPRI Yearbook 1999: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1999), pp. 63–75.

¹¹ These negative developments were partly reflected in the refusal of Uzbekistan to sign a new agreement prolonging multilateral military cooperation among the CIS states beyond the original 5-year term expiring in Apr. 1999 or to implement agreements already signed, e.g., an agreement on collective anti-aircraft defence. *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 23 Dec. 1998. In a statement released on 4 Feb. 1999, the Uzbek Foreign Ministry confirmed that ‘Uzbekistan will not extend its participation in the CIS Collective Security Treaty’, *RFE/RL Newslines*, vol. 3, no. 25, Part 1 (5 Feb. 1999).

¹² ‘Russia: FSB denies Uzbek claims about Russia’s part in conflict’, in FBIS–SOV–98–335, 1 Dec. 1998.

It has become almost commonplace to explain the diminishing political influence of Russia in the region, which has long been regarded as its 'backyard', by its diminishing role in the economies of the Central Asian states. This explanation may be only partly correct. Indeed, while Russia has not worked out any active economic strategy in the region so far, it still plays and most probably will continue to play for some time a critical role for the economic future of the landlocked Central Asian states, which have no large-scale solution to the problem of transporting their natural resources—oil and gas in particular—to the world market in such a way as to bypass Russia. Thus it was with Russia that Kazakhstan in 1992 formed the Caspian Pipeline consortium (in which a number of British, Italian and US private oil companies also took part) to transport oil from the Tenghiz oilfield, Kazakhstan's largest, over a 1600-km pipeline to the Russian port of Novorossiysk on the Black Sea. Turkmenistan, too, had to continue to negotiate with Russia over commercial terms for the delivery of its natural gas over Russian territory to Ukraine, in spite of commissioning a gas pipeline to Iran in December 1997 and searching for alternative routes to the world market either across the Caspian Sea or across Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, this situation cannot be sustained indefinitely. It will not be long before plans already in place to establish the Eurasian transport corridor, with the active participation of China, Iran, Turkey and the USA, are realized.

In the field of national security, relations between Russia and the Central Asian states are also ambivalent. On the one hand, Russian security relations with at least some of them (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in particular) are likely to continue close in the foreseeable future. Even Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, although opposing participation in any multilateral CIS defence structures, express their readiness to develop cooperation on defence issues with Russia on a bilateral basis¹³ and consider this cooperation realistically as an important part of their national defence. The maintenance of close cooperation with the Central Asian states on security issues also, of course, corresponds to Russia's own national security. Even almost a decade after the break-up of the Soviet Union, the borders of the Central Asian republics with Russia continue to be guarded rather symbolically and therefore their borders with third countries to the south for all practical purposes retain the status of a common southern border of the CIS. Russia therefore views the work of its border guards serving there along with local troops as not only preventing armed incursions into the CIS but also as protecting Russia's domestic security interests. In May 1997 Russia and Kazakhstan started operating a common air defence system while Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan expressed their intention to join it. Russia also continued to build up and strengthen the armed forces of Kazakhstan in accordance with the treaty on military cooperation signed by the

¹³ See, e.g., interview with Uzbek President Islam Karimov in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 5 May 1998; Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov's speech in *Sodruzhestvo NG* (supplement to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*), no. 11 (Dec. 1998); and 'Uzbekistan will not extend its participation in the CIS Collective Security Treaty' (note 11).

two countries in 1994. In 1995–98 Russia delivered to Kazakhstan MiG-29, Su-25 and Su-27 combat aircraft and other modern weaponry.¹⁴

There is another tendency, however, in regional security affairs—an intention in some quarters to squeeze Russia gradually out of the region. Some local actors (Uzbekistan) and extra-regional powers (the USA, for instance) are suspected or accused of this. Russian suspicions of such intentions increased when Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan stepped up their cooperation with NATO countries in the framework of the Partnership for Peace (PFP) programme. This cooperation included participation in joint military manoeuvres with the USA in 1997, the first time in Central Asia.¹⁵ Another round of such exercises was organized by the US Central Command in September 1998 in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.¹⁶ Russia interpreted these developments as another challenge to its already waning influence in Central Asia, this time in security affairs. Chinese strategic analysts saw the sending of US paratroopers to Central Asia for manoeuvres as a logical consequence of NATO's eastward expansion, indicating 'that the struggle between the big powers has spread from economic and political fields to military and security fields'.¹⁷

Developments in security affairs in the Central Asian region certainly have the potential to transform the area into one of serious confrontation between different regional and extra-regional countries, but the possibility of a direct military role for the USA and/or NATO in regional affairs seems remote at best, and in fact both impractical and counterproductive to Western interests.¹⁸

III. Multipolarity and partnership

In declaring multipolarity one of the basic principles of its revised foreign policy both globally and in Asia in particular, Russia was responding to the new realities and challenges in the post-cold war world and trying to withstand attempts by the USA after the victory in the cold war to build a new world order on the principle of unipolarity,¹⁹ thus consolidating its position as the only remaining superpower. Short of sliding into a new confrontation with the USA, which for obvious reasons it could not afford either politically, economically or militarily, Russia nevertheless maintained that such a unipolar world order can

¹⁴ See appendix 3 in this volume.

¹⁵ Gafarly, M., 'Tsentralnoaziatskiy soyuz prevrashchaetsya v voyenny blok' [Central Asian Union transforms into a military bloc], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 20 Dec. 1997; and Korbut, A., 'Novye ucheniya v Tsentralnoy Azii' [New manoeuvres in Central Asia], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2 Apr. 1998.

¹⁶ 'NATO partnership: Central Asian exercises begin in Uzbekistan', Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report—Central Eurasia: Military Affairs (FBIS-UMA)*, FBIS-UMA-98-264, 21 Sep. 1998.

¹⁷ Chen Feng, 'The international strategic situation of 1997', *International Strategic Studies* (Beijing), no. 1 (1998), p. 5.

¹⁸ For arguments in support of this view, see, e.g., Olcott, M. B., 'The Caspian's false promise', *Foreign Policy* (summer 1998), p. 111; and Jaffe, A. M. and Manning, R. A., 'The myth of the Caspian "Great Game": the real geopolitics of energy', *Survival*, vol. 40, no. 4 (winter 1998/99), p. 122.

¹⁹ Reflecting on the emerging structure of post-cold war global politics, which he terms a 'unimultipolar system', Samuel P. Huntington writes that 'the United States would clearly prefer a unipolar system in which it would be the hegemon and often acts as if such a system exists' while 'other countries feel threatened by what they see as the American pursuit of global hegemony'. Huntington, S., 'The lonely superpower', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 78, no. 2 (Mar./Apr. 1999), pp. 37–37.

in no way adequately reflect the diversity of national interests and concerns of different countries and would in fact cause international tensions and conflicts. Russia also expressed concern over what it saw as the tendency of the USA to arbitrarily declare various areas in the world to be zones of US vital national interests, which in Russia's opinion might lead to serious disturbances of the existing world order and the entire system of international relations.

In defending the principle of multipolarity in international relations, Russia had achieved noticeable progress in Asian regional affairs by the end of the 1990s. This was particularly obvious in its relations with China. Underlining their common interests in the present-day world, Russia succeeded in upgrading its relations with China from 'good-neighbourly' to the successive levels of 'constructive partnership' and further to 'strategic partnership'. Although the declared strategic partnership was a far cry from the erstwhile Soviet–Chinese political and military alliance and, as both China and Russia emphasized, was not aimed at any third party, it undoubtedly contributed to strengthening Russo–Chinese relations not only on political or economic but also on security issues. Indeed, stronger military–technical cooperation became one of the most important aspects of their relationship. During the 1990s China became the largest single buyer of Russian conventional weapons.²⁰

Growing mutual trust was reflected in agreements between Russia and China and also joined by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 1996 and 1997 on confidence building in the military field in border areas and mutual reductions of armed forces in border areas.²¹ These agreements set numerical limits on troops, arms and equipment for ground forces, frontal aviation and air defence troops in a 100-km zone along the borders of Russia and the three Central Asian states with China, although they did not include any limits on the strategic forces. In 1997 Russia and China also succeeded in reaching agreement on demarcation of the 4300 km-long eastern sector of their border, with the exception of three small disputed localities. This was a serious achievement which effectively put an end to their long dispute over the border issue and paved the way to a closer relationship on other matters of mutual interest.²²

Having achieved substantial progress in bilateral issues and in reducing their remaining controversies to the acceptable minimum, Russia and China were now able to devote more attention to their other pressing needs and concerns in international affairs. By creating a working relationship which corresponded to their basic national interests they also gained a unique opportunity, for the first time since the Soviet–Chinese rift in the 1960s, to coordinate their policies on a wide range of security issues outside their immediate bilateral agenda. Thus, addressing the world financial crisis in the joint statement adopted at their sixth summit meeting in November 1998, they called for the 'economic security of

²⁰ Anthony, I., 'Trends in post-cold war international arms transfers', ed. I. Anthony, SIPRI, *Russia and the Arms Trade* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1998), pp. 29–30.

²¹ See, e.g., chapter 18, section II, in this volume.

²² In the opinion of the Beijing Institute for International Strategic Studies, these agreements represent a 'new concept of security since the end of the Cold War'. *International Strategic Studies*, no. 1 (1998), p. 5.

sovereign states' to be ensured and for 'attempts to use currency or financial levers to impose political or economic conditions which infringe on the legitimate national interests of a particular country' to be ruled out.²³ They joined in criticism of the US–Japanese plans to cooperate in building advanced-capability Theater Missile Defense (TMD) systems which, in their opinion, would intensify tension in the Asia–Pacific region.²⁴ They also took a common stand on the need to ensure stability on the Korean Peninsula and on the issue of militant Islamic extremism, which both of them regarded as a serious threat to their national security.

However, the Sino-Russian 'strategic partnership' did not achieve the status of a closely coordinated policy and did not impose any obligations on either side in its dealings with third countries, thus reducing many of their joint statements on international affairs to mere declarations of interests and intent. This may change if Russia and China manage to boost their bilateral trade and economic cooperation, which are at present stagnant.²⁵ Although there may be no close linkage between political, security and economic cooperation, there is little doubt that the implementation of long-term agreements on massive sales of Russia's oil and gas to China is of strategic importance for both countries.

Russian policy based on the principles of multipolarity and constructive or strategic partnership was, predictably, welcomed in Asia by other countries that were critical of or openly opposed to what they saw as the US intention to dominate post-cold war international affairs. They interpreted the declared changes in the Russian foreign policy doctrine as an invitation to intensify their cooperation with Russia on political and security issues in order to withstand US pressures as well as to coordinate their responses to concrete problems that give rise to mutual concerns. The new Russian policy also presented them with opportunities to gain access to certain types of sophisticated military-related technologies denied to them by the West for political reasons.

Thus in the case of India a rapprochement with Russia on this new basis meant, among other things, the intensification of bilateral cooperation on the modernization of the Indian armed forces, including the navy, with the latest Russian weapon systems. This cooperation was further enhanced by Russia's decision to offer India joint development and production of new weapon systems.²⁶ Russia renewed its assurances to India that it would not supply arms to Pakistan²⁷ and in December 1998 signed a new long-term defence cooperation programme with India up to the year 2010. Total projected Russian arms sales to India over that period were estimated at about \$16 billion or more—at

²³ The full text of the Russian–Chinese Declaration is available in *Diplomaticheskii Vestnik*, no. 12 (1998), pp. 7–10.

²⁴ 'Russia: Russia, PRC reaffirm military cooperation', in FBIS-SOV-98-298, 25 Oct. 1998.

²⁵ Although Russia and China planned to increase their bilateral trade to \$20 billion as early as 2000, its actual value in 1997 was only slightly over \$6 billion, and in 1998 fell by a further 10% because of the Russian financial crisis and the fall in the value of the rouble. *RFE/RL Newswire*, vol. 3, no. 62, Part 1 (2 Feb. 1999).

²⁶ 'India: Growing India–Russia defence cooperation', in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report–Near East and South Asia*(FBIS-NES), FBIS- NES-98-253, 10 Sep. 1998.

²⁷ 'Russia: Sergeyev praises Russian–Indian defense cooperation', in FBIS-SOV-98-292, 19 Oct. 1998.

least twice the amount of military hardware and spare parts delivered to India over the seven-year period 1990–96.²⁸ The new programme would also involve a transfer to India of modern military technology, intensifying and adding new substance to the defence cooperation.²⁹

Although Russia expressed official disapproval of the Indian nuclear tests of May 1998, it refused to join US-initiated economic sanctions against India or to abrogate the earlier (1988) contracts for the construction of the nuclear plant in Tamil Nadu and for the supply of two light-water nuclear reactors.³⁰

Russia also proceeded, in spite of strong opposition from the USA and Israel, in providing large-scale assistance to Iran in creating its civilian nuclear power industry. Moreover, in 1998, disregarding US objections, Russia announced its plans to increase the number of nuclear reactors to be sold to Iran.³¹ Later in the year the Russian State Duma voted overwhelmingly³² for the expansion not only of political and economic but also of military cooperation with Iran.

In doing this Russia sought to demonstrate to its Asian partners that in dealing with them it would now be guided primarily by mutual interests and that it would no longer blindly follow trade or any other restrictions unilaterally imposed by the USA, as it did in 1993 when it restricted the sale of cryogenic rocket technology to India. As a reward Russia expected not only to increase its arms and other exports but also to create or rebuild a basis for broader cooperation with several Asian countries on political and security issues. Indeed, strengthening commercial relations with Iran paved the way for better understanding and cooperation between Russia and Iran on such diverse and very sensitive issues as the conflicts in Afghanistan and Tajikistan and the status of the Caspian Sea. In relations with India Russia succeeded in achieving compatibility between Russian and Indian strategic interests on such issues as the need to preserve peace and stability in Central Asia and to support those forces in Afghanistan that were fighting the fundamentalist Taleban movement.

Pragmatism in the pursuit of multipolarity

It would be an oversimplification and in fact misleading to interpret the application of the new Russian foreign policy doctrine in Asia as merely an attempt to exploit anti-US or anti-Western feelings in regional countries or to focus only on those aspects that reflected criticism of US policies. In fact Russia used its promotion of the principles of multipolarity and constructive/strategic partnership in international relations and pointedly distanced itself from coalitions and blocs in order to pursue quite different goals—to give itself maximum flexi-

²⁸ Mukhin, V., 'Su-30 MK poluchit tolko Indiya' [Only India will get the Su-30 MK], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 11 Nov. 1998.

²⁹ Timofeev, A. and Bausin, A., 'Primakov forging military partnership', *Moscow News*, 24–30 Dec. 1998.

³⁰ *RFE/RL Newslines*, vol. 2, no. 94, Part 1 (19 May 1998).

³¹ Gordon, M., 'US offers Russia a satellite deal if it halts missile technology to Iran', *International Herald Tribune*, 10 Mar. 1998.

³² 'Russia: State Duma urges expansion of Russia–Iran military ties', in FBIS-SOV-98-295, 22 Oct. 1998.

bility in dealing with the outside world at a time when its economic and military capabilities were seriously weakened. Acting in the spirit of multipolarity allowed Russia to avoid being tied to any one-sided political or ideological approaches and to pursue its national interests in a completely pragmatic manner.

This pragmatic approach was demonstrated when Russia set out on an active course of improving relations with Japan, which had remained poisoned by mutual mistrust and suspicion for almost the whole period since the end of World War II. The years 1996–98 saw an intensive exchange of high-level visits between Russia and Japan, including formal and informal summit meetings of their leaders in Krasnoyarsk (November 1997), Kawana (April 1998) and Moscow (November 1998). At the Moscow summit meeting Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi signed a joint declaration establishing a ‘creative partnership’ between their two countries. New initiatives based on compromise were put forward on both sides on major political, security and economic issues in order to pave the way for the signing of a long-overdue peace treaty between Russia and Japan.³³

In the process significant progress was made in their bilateral relations on security affairs. Russia announced the de-targeting of its strategic missiles aimed at Japan and continued with the planned reduction of its conventional military forces in the Russian far east in the larger framework of the ongoing military reform. At the summit meeting in Krasnoyarsk it was agreed that the Russian and Japanese navies would develop cooperation that would include exchanges of visits of warships and joint manoeuvres to practise rescue operations at sea. The first-ever exchange of visits of defence ministers supplemented by visits of other high-ranking military officials of both countries followed the Krasnoyarsk meeting and helped to establish a regular security dialogue between Russia and Japan.³⁴ In July 1998 another round of by then regular joint naval exercises was carried out in the northern part of the Sea of Japan and in December 1998 General Anatoly Kvashnin, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, paid an official visit to Japan.³⁵

There were, however, clear limits to their political and security cooperation, dictated (a) by the still unresolved territorial dispute over the southern Kuril Islands and (b) by the unquestionable priority consistently accorded by Japan in national security issues to the USA. The latter resulted in a redefining and strengthening of the 1960 US–Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security in 1997 which, Russia (and China) worry, may lead to an arbitrary expansion of the area of security responsibility covered by the treaty similar to what is happening with NATO in Europe. Japan’s plans to use its armed forces in the event of an emergency in ‘areas adjacent to Japan’ as specified by the 1997

³³ The full text of the Russian–Japanese Declaration is available in *Diplomatičeskij Vestnik*, no. 12 (Dec. 1998), pp. 11–14.

³⁴ ‘Russia: Russia, Japan move to improve military cooperation’, in FBIS-UMA-98-026, 26 Jan. 1998.

³⁵ Markushin, V., ‘Poezdka nachalnika Generalnogo shtaba’ [Chief of General Staff visit], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 4 Dec. 1998.

revised Guidelines for US–Japan Defence Cooperation raise legitimate questions in Moscow as to how these areas are defined, whether they extend to the territory of third states (including Russia), and who will determine the degree of ‘emergency’ and in what way. Serious concern is also caused by Japan’s intention to establish, in cooperation with the USA, a close-range Theater Missile Defense (TMD) system. This is regarded in Russia as a violation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. Similarly, Japan’s decision to launch a series of intelligence-gathering satellites in 1999–2003 as part of a joint programme with the USA in researching a TMD system³⁶ is regarded in Moscow with the greatest concern.

In the framework of strengthening Russia’s security relations with the Asia–Pacific countries, Igor Sergeev, Russian Defence Minister, visited Viet Nam at the end of 1998. Although after the break-up of the Soviet Union the former alliance relationship between Russia and Viet Nam was over, Russia, in the words of Sergeev, was still regarded in Viet Nam as a strategic partner. During his visit a number of agreements on bilateral military cooperation were signed, envisaging large-scale sales of Russian arms to Viet Nam. The two sides also agreed that Russia would continue to maintain its presence at the naval base in Cam Ranh, although the terms of its rental of facilities there were to be renegotiated.³⁷

Conducting its policy on the principles of multipolarity and constructive/strategic partnership undoubtedly helped Russia to restore its ties with most of its former friends and allies in Asia and to upgrade significantly its relations with such important regional actors as China, Japan and Iran. It was particularly effective in Asia since international relations in this part of the world had been multipolar even during the days of bipolarity and remained such after the end of the cold war and the disappearance of the Soviet Union. The Russian policy of multipolarity is therefore not a reactive one; it addresses the objective realities of international relations in Asia and Asia–Pacific.

It is also worth noting in this context that Russia has been fairly careful in describing official relations with its Asian counterparts in terms of ‘good-neighbourly relations’, ‘constructive partnership’ and ‘strategic partnership’, emphasizing that there are different levels of relationships. If the pursuit of ‘good-neighbourly’ relations was the main course of Russia’s non-adversarial foreign policy in Asia in the post-Soviet period, ‘constructive’ and especially ‘strategic’ partnership was meant to signal a much closer degree of cooperation in different areas of interstate relations with a few carefully chosen countries, reflecting the growing scope of compatible or shared interests. It was therefore significant that by the end of 1998 strategic partnership characterized Russia’s relations with only one Asian country outside the CIS—China—although

³⁶ Kristof, N., ‘Japan plans spy satellites over a suspicious region’, *International Herald Tribune*, 7–8 Nov. 1998.

³⁷ ‘Strategicheskoye partnyorstvo obrashchonnoye v 21 vek’ [Strategic partnership addressed to the 21st century], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 27 Oct. 1998.

preparations were in progress to upgrade relations with India to the same level.³⁸ Russian relations with Iran also progressed quite substantially in the 1990s and were sometimes termed in the press ‘strategic partnership’.³⁹ However, officially they were yet to be raised to this level, and doing so might involve an even greater degree of cooperation between Moscow and Tehran on bilateral and international issues.

The effectiveness of the new policy

Although the new Russian foreign policy doctrine was a useful tool for promoting Russian national interests in the area of international security, it was effective only to a certain degree. It was developed as probably the best possible response to national requirements at a time when Russia’s capabilities were extremely limited. However, the same factors set the limits to the effectiveness of this approach. Skilful political manoeuvring coupled with the use of still available material and technical resources helped Russia regain some of its previous influence in Asian regional affairs, but it was not sufficient to persuade even the closest of its new friends to expand their partnership with Russia beyond declarations of common attitudes regarding certain international issues of common concern.

Russia’s considerable loss of status and prestige after the collapse of the Soviet Union marked its relations with its counterparts in Asia quite negatively. Thus its relations with India were substantially improved after their cooling off at the beginning of the 1990s. The common interests of Russia and India as major multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-religious states committed to democratic development were emphasized by both sides. On the other hand, as with Sino-Russian relations, this new relationship, although it undoubtedly reflected shared interests on a number of security issues, including security on the Indian subcontinent or in Central Asia, lacked the characteristics that define a true close partnership. That became clear when India did not send Russia any prior notice of its plans to conduct nuclear tests in May 1998 and did not propose any consultations on this highly sensitive and extremely important issue. Neither India nor China displayed any great interest in the proposal put forward by Prime Minister Primakov on his official visit to India in December 1998 to create a ‘strategic triangle’ made up of Russia, India and China.⁴⁰ This proposal was made at a time when both China and India were opposing the US–British military action against Iraq, undertaken without the appropriate decision of the UN Security Council, but neither of them deemed it possible to go beyond formal diplomatic protests.

³⁸ An official document reflecting this new stage in Russo-Indian relations was expected to be signed in Dec. 1998 but was postponed because of the ill health of President Yeltsin, which prevented him from making a visit to Delhi. Tamin, A., ‘Zavershilsya vizit premyer ministra RF v Delhi’ [Russian Prime Minister’s visit to Delhi completed], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 23 Dec. 1998.

³⁹ For a detailed discussion, see Golan, G., *Russia and Iran: A Strategic Partnership?*, Discussion Paper no. 75 (Royal Institute of International Affairs: London, 1998).

⁴⁰ *RFE/RL Newslines*, vol. 2, no. 244, Part 1 (21 Dec. 1998).

Even more confusing was Russia's record in the post-Soviet period on the Korean Peninsula, where the Soviet Union and Russia had had serious national security interests since the end of World War II. Until the later 1980s promotion of these interests was associated in Moscow basically with maintaining alliance relations with North Korea. In the years that followed Russia first moved to a more balanced relationship with both North and South Korea, and in the first half of the 1990s tilted towards South Korea, downgrading its relations with Pyongyang to the minimum. These policy changes culminated in 1995 when Moscow notified Pyongyang of its intention to replace the 1961 Soviet–North Korean Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance and proposed to exclude from a new treaty any obligations to provide military support to its former ally. At the same time it tried to expand its relationship with Seoul by signing an agreement on massive arms exports to South Korea.⁴¹

The abandonment of a balanced approach backfired. It resulted in a predictable loss of influence not only in Pyongyang but also in Seoul. The negative consequences were first felt when Russia was not invited to take part in the implementation of the 1994 US–North Korean Framework Agreement, which envisaged among other things assistance to North Korea by supplying it with light-water nuclear power reactors,⁴² although Russia had the necessary experience and technologies in this field. These consequences became absolutely clear when South Korea did not support Russia's inclusion in the proposed four-party talks between the two Koreas, China and the USA on a final settlement of the Korean problem.

Although under the new policy guidelines Russia tried to regain its position on the Korean Peninsula, it was not until the new government of President Kim Dae Jung was established in Seoul and launched its 'sunshine policy' that the Russian–South Korean political dialogue started to improve. South Korea's positive change of attitude towards the role of Russia in preserving peace and security on the Korean Peninsula and in North-East Asia in general was reflected in Kim's proposal for the participation of Russia along with China, Japan, North and South Korea, Mongolia and the USA in multilateral negotiations on North-East Asian security.⁴³ As another indication of improving relations, ties in the security field were revived when in October 1998 a South Korean naval squadron visited Vladivostok and held joint exercises there with the Russian Pacific Fleet.⁴⁴ Russia and South Korea also intensified their high-level political contacts when in January 1999 the South Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade visited Moscow, while the Russian State Duma

⁴¹ Sergounin, A. A. and Subbotin, A. V., *Russian Arms Transfers to East Asia in the 1990s*, SIPRI Research Report no. 15 (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1999), pp. 111–15.

⁴² Goodby, J. E., Kile, S. and Müller, H., 'Nuclear arms control', *SIPRI Yearbook 1995: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1995), pp. 653–56.

⁴³ 'Japan: Kim calls for 7-way talks on East Asia security', in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report—East Asia (FBIS-EAS)*, FBIS-EAS-98-282, 9 Oct. 1998.

⁴⁴ 'Russia: South Korean naval squadron to visit Vladivostok', in FBIS-UMA-98-292, 19 Oct. 1998.

speaker Gennady Seleznev visited Seoul in April and held talks there with President Kim Dae Jung on a wide range of bilateral issues.⁴⁵

Trying to restore a more balanced approach to Korean affairs, Russia resumed an active dialogue with North Korea as well. As a result in 1996 their joint commission on economic, trade and technical cooperation resumed its work and in the next two years a number of contracts on bilateral cooperation in coal, oil refining and steel industries were signed.⁴⁶ Another step in this direction was taken when, after protracted negotiations that began in 1993, a trilateral Russian–North Korean–Chinese agreement defining the border along the Tumen River was finally signed in November 1998.⁴⁷

The process of Russia and North Korea establishing closer relations was highlighted in March 1999 by the preliminary approval by senior government officials of both countries of the Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation, which was described by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin as an important contribution to stability and security in North-East Asia.⁴⁸

Arms transfers policy

Besides intensifying its diplomatic efforts, Russia also tried other methods to pursue its national security interests in Asia and Asia–Pacific. Special significance was given to arms sales, although promoting arms trade globally and regionally had long been an important part of Russia's policy. In the framework of the new foreign policy doctrine, however, the promotion of arms sales became part of the foreign policy concept.

This approach to the issue of arms sales was based, first, on the fact that the armed forces of many countries in the world were using Soviet/Russian arms and military equipment. Thousands of tanks, aircraft, helicopters, anti-aircraft and radar systems, battleships and infantry fighting vehicles sold or supplied to them in previous years needed spares and ammunition and thus created a sizeable market, even though some of those weapon systems were obsolete beyond repair or modernization. Thus, while defence expenditure in the world was largely on the decline in the post-cold war period and the world market was saturated with weapons, Russia claimed that it had succeeded by 1998 in restoring its arms sales to as many as 39 countries, the same number as were Soviet clients on the arms market during the cold war.⁴⁹ Second, arms sales had a clear tendency to grow in importance in Russian industrial exports in the post-Soviet period, even though their overall value had fallen radically compared to

⁴⁵ *RFE/RL Newswire*, vol. 3, no. 17, Part 1 (26 Jan. 1999); and 'South Korean leader urges wider relations with Russia', FBIS-SOV-1999-0426, 26 Apr. 1999.

⁴⁶ Denisov, V., 'Rossiya–KNDR: 50 let druzhby i dobrososedstva' [Russia–DPRK: 50 years of friendship and good-neighbourliness], *Diplomaticheskii Vestnik*, no. 10 (Oct. 1998), p. 51.

⁴⁷ *RFE/RL Newswire*, vol. 2, no. 215, Part 1 (6 Nov. 1998).

⁴⁸ Karasin, G., 'Nasha kontseptsiya—bezopasnost cherez ekonomiku' [Our concept is security through the economy], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 26 Mar. 1999.

⁴⁹ Ananyev, E., 'Dlya uspekha u Rosvooruzheniye est vsyo krome vremeni' [Rosvooruzheniye has all the conditions for success except time], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 22 July 1998.

that of Soviet times. In the five-year period 1993–97 average annual sales by Russia of conventional weapons on the world market amounted to \$3 billion (at constant 1990 prices) and accounted for about 80 per cent of Russia's industrial exports,⁵⁰ while the Russian defence industry was dependent on arms exports for two-thirds of its revenues.⁵¹ Third, Russia was willing now not only to sell finished weapons but also to transfer advanced military technology and conclude licensing agreements to allow the recipient countries to build advanced Russian military hardware.

By 1997 Russia had not only stabilized its arms sales at a level which brought it back into the club of top weapon exporters; it had also built up the basis for a further expansion of these sales by successfully exploring new markets, mostly in Asian countries—notably China, India, Iran, South Korea and several ASEAN member states. They played a crucial role in Russian arms sales policies and took a dominant share in Russian arms exports.⁵² China's share alone over the five years 1993–97 was over 26 per cent on average and in certain years much higher: in 1997 it reached 50.2 per cent. The total share of Asian countries in Russian arms sales over the same period was almost 75 per cent on average and never less than 44 per cent.⁵³

Although the political aspects of arms sales in Asia were played down by the Russian authorities in the post-cold war spirit in favour of their economic importance, the direction and volume of these sales did not go unnoticed and caused intensive debate on their strategic significance both at home and abroad. Most comments concerned arms sales to China and India since they were the largest and included the transfer of such modern weapons and weapon systems as MiG-29 and Su-27 fighter aircraft, military helicopters, missile and radar systems, submarines and surface combatants. In the opinion of some observers the acquisition of these arms by China and India not only strengthened their defensive capabilities but also helped them to build a sizeable offensive potential, thus negatively influencing the existing military balance in the region.

There were serious debates on these issues in Russia itself, revealing the lack of a common position in political quarters on the question whether such massive arms sales might indeed have a destabilizing effect on regional security and even put Russia's own security at risk. Statements by then Defence Minister Igor Rodionov in 1996 and by some of the leaders and activists of the liberal Yabloko party, which included China on the list of potential military threats to Russia, are worth noting in this connection.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Ananyev (note 49).

⁵¹ Rudenko, V., 'Eksport ne umenshitsya' [Exports will not be reduced], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 1 Dec. 1998.

⁵² Anthony (note 20).

⁵³ SIPRI arms transfers database.

⁵⁴ Yegorov, V., 'U rossiyskoy armii est veroyatny protivnik' [The Russian Army has a possible enemy], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 14 Dec. 1995; and Korotchenko, I., 'Igor Rodionov vystupil za sozdaniye obronogo soyuza stran SNG' [Igor Rodionov proposes creation of a CIS defence alliance], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 26 Dec. 1996.

Unperturbed by these fears and concerns, as the visits of Defence Minister Sergeyev to India, Viet Nam and China in 1998 showed, Russia planned to continue with substantial arms sales to Asian countries as an important part of its policy in this part of the world.

IV. Multilateral security

Along with active promotion of bilateral relations with major actors in Asia and Asia-Pacific, Russia continued to explore the possibilities for creating effective mechanisms of regional security. In the absence of any established regional structures or agreements, Russia had to take into account the already existing security arrangements, which could be divided into three broad categories: (a) bilateral and multilateral political and military treaties and alliances such as the US–Japan and US–South Korea security treaties, the 1951 ANZUS (Australia–New Zealand–USA) Treaty, and others; (b) organizations dealing mainly with economic security such as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO, consisting of South-Western and Central Asian states), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in South Asia, ASEAN in South-East Asia or the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation forum (APEC, comprising Asia-Pacific countries); and (c) official or ‘track two’ (unofficial) security dialogue forums like the ARF or the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP).⁵⁵

Obviously, in dealing with such diverse structures Russia had to follow different strategies. In the case of political and military treaties and alliances created during the cold war with the clear purpose of containing and ‘rolling back’ the Soviet Union and based on close cooperation with the USA, the best option for Russia was a two-pronged one: (a) to prevent their developing into anti-Russian political and military structures; and (b) to help them be more effective in preventing the escalation of regional/subregional tensions. It was with this purpose that then Defence Minister Rodionov made what looked like a sensational statement in 1997 in support of the US–Japanese security treaty, which Russia declared to be no longer a threat to its national security and even considered as an important stabilizing factor in Asia-Pacific international relations.⁵⁶

In the case of regional/subregional economic structures, Russia set joining them wherever possible as an important goal of its foreign policy. These efforts culminated in the formal admission of Russia to APEC as a full member in November 1998.⁵⁷ This was rightly considered a notable achievement of Russian foreign policy, not only because APEC was the largest trading bloc in the world, accounting for about 50 per cent of world trade turnover and about 20 per cent of Russia’s foreign trade, but also because membership, in the

⁵⁵ For the membership of all these organizations, see appendix 1 in this volume.

⁵⁶ *East Asia Strategic Review 1997/98* (National Institute of Defense Studies: Tokyo, 1998), p. 141.

⁵⁷ *RFE/RL Newswire*, vol. 2, no. 221, Part 1 (16 Nov. 1998).

opinion of Russian observers, would enhance the political status of Russia as an Asian or Asia-Pacific country.⁵⁸ It may also facilitate the process that has already started of strengthening Russia's commercial, financial, technological and other economic ties with the Asia-Pacific region. This has happened largely because provinces in the Russian far east and Siberia found it economically attractive to divert a substantial part of their trade to neighbouring markets in China, Japan and South Korea. Closer economic ties have been established between the Russian far east and Siberia on the one hand and East Asian states on the other through the increase of border trade, foreign investment activities and long-term production agreements between Russian and foreign companies,⁵⁹ although the process was interrupted by the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98 and then by Russia's own economic meltdown in the second half of 1998.

Finally, an important part of Russian foreign policy in Asia and Asia-Pacific was active participation in different official and unofficial security dialogues in the region which were seen in Moscow as a useful tool for creating a comprehensive regional security system. In this context the promotion of relations with ASEAN as one of the most important organizations in the post-cold war political and security environment in the region started to play a highly significant role in the Russian foreign policy of multipolarity. The annual ASEAN PMCs and the ARF began to be regarded by Moscow as an important contribution to building up an atmosphere of trust in the region and working out concrete CBMs in relations between regional countries. The development of a security dialogue with ASEAN as an emerging alternative centre in Asia-Pacific international relations also fitted well with the objectives of a multipolar foreign policy. Thus not only did Russia now participate regularly in the PMCs as a fully-fledged ASEAN 'dialogue partner' and become an active member of the ARF; it also established direct dialogue with ASEAN at the level of foreign ministers, which was to serve as a forum for the discussion of political issues of mutual interest on a regular basis.⁶⁰

In the area of political and military security in the region, Russia started by creating CBMs with regional countries on a bilateral level, their basic elements ranging from exchange of visits of military delegations at different levels to joint defence and peacekeeping exercises; from exchange of information on defence budgets to voluntarily informing Russia's counterparts in the region about changes in defence policy and national security doctrine; and from reducing armed forces in border areas to deploying them in a clearly non-offensive posture. Agreements on these CBMs with such major regional actors as China

⁵⁸ Kistanov, V., 'Rossiya, Yaponiya i ATEs' [Russia, Japan and APEC], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 9 Apr. 1998; and Goncharenko, S., 'Rossiya i ATEs' [Russia and APEC], *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya*, no. 10 (1998), pp. 88-89.

⁵⁹ For more detail, see Chufirin, G., 'Multilateral economic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region', ed. H. Soesastro, *One Southeast Asia in a New Regional and International Setting* (Centre for Strategic and International Studies: Jakarta, 1997).

⁶⁰ 'R. Severino v Rossii' [R. Severino in Russia], *Diplomaticheskii Vestnik*, no. 7 (July 1998), p. 38; and 'Russia: Russia-ASEAN meetings to be held on regular basis', in FBIS-SOV-98-158, 7 June 1998.

and Japan became an important stepping-stone in the Russian policy of promoting the establishment of a multilateral regional security system in Asia and Asia-Pacific. Analysts from the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), a leading Russian research institute in the field of Russian and international security, described the agreements reached between China and Russia in 1996–97 (also signed by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) on mutual reductions of armed forces along their common borders as an important breakthrough in confidence building and even as ‘setting a precedent in intra-Asian relations and serving as a model for a possible approach to the resolution of similar problems in the Asia-Pacific region’.⁶¹

CBMs may indeed be considered important for creating a cooperative or comprehensive security system in Asia and Asia-Pacific, but only as a first stage. The countries of the region, Russia among them, recognize the need to go beyond it and to establish in the region mechanisms of preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution that will help them to de-escalate and defuse existing tensions and reduce the prospects of and incentives for new disputes. The creation of such mechanisms is particularly important in anticipation of fundamental changes in the strategic environment in Asia in the next 10–15 years with possible Korean reunification, a declaration of independence by Taiwan or Japan’s developing a more assertive role in regional security affairs.

V. Conclusions: what next?

Political developments in post-Soviet Russia follow one another rapidly and can transform the political landscape in the country radically from one round of parliamentary and presidential elections to another. If it is true that the post-Soviet Russian foreign policy is fundamentally different in its motivations, goals and methods from Soviet foreign policy it is also true that in its turn Russian foreign policy as pursued since 1996 has been remarkably different in many aspects from what it was initially in its doctrinal approach to international relations in general and to relations with the Asian countries in particular.

Sometimes this new Russian foreign policy was criticized in the West as being based on the principles of a ‘zero-sum game’ and barely concealed anti-Americanism. ‘Russia still tends to view the world through balance of power lenses: another country’s gain is Russia’s loss, and vice versa, especially when that other country is America’, wrote *The Economist*.⁶² Other Western observers see this policy as another form of Gaullism: thus the prestigious US Council on Foreign Relations describes it as fitting ‘quite comfortably into what might be called the Gaullist paradigm: a host of strategic objectives and tactical measures

⁶¹ Zagorsky, A. and Osroukhov, O., ‘Sokrashcheniye vooruzhenii i mery voyennogo doveriya v rayone granitsy SNG s KNR’ [Arms reduction and military CBMs along the CIS border with China], *Razoruzheniye i Bezopasnost*, 1997/98 (Nauka: Moscow, 1997), p. 257.

⁶² ‘Russia’s world’, *The Economist*, 9 May 1998, p. 16.

deployed to obtain by other (mostly symbolic) means that which used to flow from the abundance of tangible military–political assets'.⁶³

For Primakov, who was Russian Foreign Minister from January 1996 to September 1998 and Prime Minister from September 1998 to May 1999 and a principal architect of the new Russian foreign policy, it was not General Charles de Gaulle who served as a model but Prince Alexander Gorchakov, the chancellor who was at the helm of Russian foreign policy for 26 years after 1856, taking over this post after the defeat of Russia in the Crimean War. His example was particularly relevant for Primakov since Prince Gorchakov, acting under extremely adverse international conditions and serious domestic difficulties—a situation very similar to that Russia has found itself in in the post-Soviet period—set clear guidelines as to how to restore the position of Russia as a great power in the 'concert of nations'. In a speech on the 200th anniversary of Gorchakov's birth, Primakov stressed that to achieve the resurrection of Russia as a great power Prince Gorchakov advocated a vigorous foreign policy that was not limited to a single direction or area of concern but active in all areas. In doing this Russia not only relied on its own strength but could always exploit the resentment many small countries inevitably feel against larger ones. Gorchakov also understood what Primakov argued was the fundamental basis of Russian foreign policy: 'There are no constant enemies but there are constant national interests'.⁶⁴

Drawing on Prince Gorchakov's experience, Primakov maintained that Russian foreign policy had to adopt a balanced approach, neither advancing excessive claims that failed to recognize what had happened in the past decade nor setting 'deliberately low standards' that would ignore Moscow's continuing possibilities.⁶⁵ This policy won widespread, cross-party domestic support—no mean achievement by any standards, but especially remarkable at a time when very few activities of the federal government escaped severe criticism from different quarters.

However, the ability of Russia not only to upgrade but even to sustain its role in international relations in the foreseeable future remains in serious doubt.

This uncertainty is predicated above all on Russia's domestic development. It is clear that unless the current grave political, social and economic problems are resolved Russia's role in international relations in general and in Asia in particular is bound to decline. No amount of diplomatic effort will be enough on its own to assure a secure and prosperous future for Russia in Asia and the Asia–Pacific region unless the current institutional crisis, involving the fundamental

⁶³ Aron, L., 'The foreign policy doctrine of postcommunist Russia and its domestic context', ed. M. Mandelbaum, *The New Russian Foreign Policy* (Council on Foreign Relations: New York, 1998), p. 31.

⁶⁴ In stark contrast to these views was the attitude taken by Kozyrev. In an interview given to one of the right-wing Russian newspapers he described the shift in Russian foreign policy after 1995 towards 'a concept of national interests' as 'one big mistake' since it 'assumes Russia's opposition above all to the most developed countries'. *Moscow News*, 24–30 Dec. 1998.

⁶⁵ Primakov, Ye., 'Rossiya v mirovoy politike: k 200-letiyu A. M. Gorchakova' [Russia in world politics: on the 200th anniversary of A. M. Gorchakov], *Diplomaticheskii Vestnik*, no. 7 (July 1998), pp. 78–79.

norms, standards and principles of Russia's statehood, is arrested. Moreover, if these negative processes are not reversed not only will Russia continue to lose heavily in international relations, but domestically the unprecedented economic and social crisis will also facilitate regionalist tendencies already existing in certain areas across Russia, in both the European and the Asian parts of the country, bringing them to the point of open separatism.

The economic and social aspects of this problem, which has become a serious issue of national security, are further exacerbated by the diversity of Russia's historical, cultural and ethnic traditions and experience. In the future, as is the case now and has been the case since the 16th century when Russia became a multiracial state, it will experience the effect of two conflicting tendencies. The first will work in favour of closer coexistence and interrelationships between different ethnic, linguistic and confessional groups and communities, since preserving the unity of Russia is seen by large sections of the society—probably the majority of the nation—as the only guarantee for national survival and further progress. The second tendency, which will favour the further disintegration of the Russian state as the 'natural' course of events after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, is promoted both by extreme chauvinistic political forces identifying themselves with different ethnic communities (Chechens, Tatars, Bashkirs and so on) and by 'modernists' who treat most of the non-Russian ethnic communities as a heavy burden for Russia in its drive for modernization and progress.

The next decade or so will be critical for the future of the Russian nationhood and by implication therefore for the future of Russia in Asia. Judging from the previous history of Russia, it will most probably not be political and not even economic factors per se but mostly interracial and cultural ones which help to solve the basic contradiction between these two conflicting tendencies—in favour of the first. This perception is based on the understanding that balanced socio-cultures, especially those that have formed over many centuries and of which the Eurasian society of Russia is a clear example, tend to withstand external and domestic pressures most successfully. In this context the foreign policy of Russia should aim to preserve national integrity and actively oppose religious extremism and aggressive nationalism as serious threats to the security of Russia.⁶⁶

Closely linked to Russia's current economic problems is the continuing decline in the state of its national defence and its ability to withstand possible external military threats. This is especially true of its conventional armed forces, including those deployed in the Asian part of the country, whose numerical strength and combat readiness declined substantially during the 1990s.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Chufrin, G., 'Security concerns of Russia in Asia-Pacific', ed. D. Dickens, *No Better Alternative: Towards Comprehensive and Cooperative Security in the Asia-Pacific* (Center for Strategic Studies, Victoria University of Wellington: Wellington, New Zealand, 1997), pp. 133–43.

⁶⁷ According to Western assessments, by the end of the 1990s 'modern types comprised only about 40% of tanks and infantry vehicles, 30% of SAM and artillery systems and 2% of helicopters' of the Russian armed forces. Dick, C. J., *Russian Military Reform: Status and Prospects* (Conflict Studies Research Centre: Canberra, June 1998), p. 1. The cash-starved Russian Government is unable, however, to

It is important to emphasize in this connection that the USSR's position in Asia was determined to a significant degree by its military and not its economic power. The sharp decline in the state of its armed forces has therefore undermined Russia's position and influence in Asia even more seriously than in Europe. In these circumstances it is difficult to imagine that Russia's counterparts in Asia and Asia-Pacific (or at least some of them) will remain passive and will not assume a more aggressive policy towards Russia, challenging its territorial integrity and political sovereignty over certain regions, for instance, the north Caucasus, Siberia or the Russian far east.⁶⁸

Domestic factors will be central for the future of Russia in Asia, but this does not mean that developments in other Asian countries or in regional political and security relations as a whole, having their own dynamics, may not influence Russia's interests significantly.

First on the agenda of these potential or real threats to Russia's security is the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the means of their delivery, which became endemic in Asia in the 1990s and will most certainly cause periodic escalation of tensions in regional and global international relations in the foreseeable future. India, Iraq, Israel, North Korea and Pakistan, which possess or are suspected of possessing such weapons, form the 'southern belt' in close vicinity to the Russian borders, thus forcing Russia to keep these issues high on the priority list of its relations with these countries. From Russia's national perspective it will be essential: (a) that these states comply with internationally accepted norms and regulations of non-proliferation and; (b) that the tensions in which these states are involved are prevented from developing into open military conflicts that may lead to the use of weapons of mass destruction.

Another serious threat to Russia's security in Asia is linked to developments in some Central Asian and South-West Asian countries where radical Islamist forces are assuming or have already assumed a prominent political role. From Russia's national perspective these developments are a grave threat to its domestic security and will require a credible long-term policy to counter them, preferably in close coordination with those CIS states that may also feel beleaguered by the 'Islamic threat'.

However, the threat of radical Islam is not the only one that may destabilize the situation in Central Asia and as a consequence undermine Russia's own security. Another potential source of such instability is ethnic or interstate con-

embark on modernization of its armed forces. As Defence Minister Igor Sergeev conceded in his speech at the Air Defence Academy in Tver on 8 Feb. 1999: 'The Russian armed forces will not start receiving new weapons until after 2005. Until then existing weapons must be repaired and updated if possible'. *RFE/RL Newslines*, vol. 3, no. 27, Part 1 (9 Feb. 1999).

⁶⁸ Such scenarios are already being actively considered in the USA. See, e.g., Brzezinski, Z., 'A geostrategy for Eurasia', *Foreign Affairs*, Sep./Oct. 1997, p. 56 where the author advocates 'a loosely confederated Russia composed of a European Russia, a Siberian republic and a Far Eastern republic'. Also worth noting in this context is the conflict of interests in Russian-Turkish relations in the north Caucasus and the debates in Turkey. See, e.g., Kireyev, N., 'The medium and long-term interests of Turkey in its relations with Russia', in *Blizhniy Vostok i Sovremennost* [The Middle East and modern times] (Institute of Israel and Middle East Studies: Moscow, 1997), 4th edn, pp. 176-79. See also chapter 10 in this volume.

flicts in this subregion of Asia, as the events in Khujand in late 1998 demonstrated. Any serious destabilization in intra-state relations in the Central Asian countries may provoke outside actors to interfere and internationalize the conflict. It will be in the best national interests of Russia to use all its influence to prevent such a situation from developing since otherwise Russia will be left with little choice—either to interfere to defend its declared vital national interests in this part of the world or to withdraw, thus continuing its strategic retreat from Asia.

A serious threat to Russia's security in Asia may also result from the escalation of tensions or even from a possible open military conflict in East Asia either on the Korean Peninsula or in the Taiwan Strait. In both cases (and especially in case of the Korean conflict) Russia's national interests will be directly involved.

Summing up the analysis of Russian policy in Asia and the Asia-Pacific region in the post-Soviet period it is important to emphasize that it is in the national interests of Russia to preserve stability in the region and reduce existing tensions at the regional or subregional levels to the minimum. Escalation of international tensions and possible military conflicts, especially in areas close to the Russian national borders, may pose a direct threat to Russian national security and consequently force Russia to divert much-needed resources from domestic economic and social to security purposes. It is also in the higher national interests of Russia to develop its economic ties with the region, since this may help it resolve its current economic problems and ensure sustainable economic growth. To achieve these goals it is important for Russia to maintain non-adversarial relations with all the regional countries and to promote closer relations (otherwise called partnership relationships) with the major actors in the area. Finally, it is in the long-term interests of Russia to promote multi-lateral regional mechanisms of conflict prevention and conflict resolution that may eventually create a fundamentally new, post-cold war regional security regime in Asia and Asia-Pacific based on the principles of multipolarity and international cooperation.