

# Missed Opportunities: Could a U.S.-Russian Dialogue on Asia-Pacific Have Prevented the New Cold War?

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A U.S.-Russian dialogue on the Asia Pacific could have become a vital pillar of cooperation and helped sustain the bilateral relations through their deterioration in 2011 and especially since 2014. This is due to the importance of the Asia Pacific to both Russia and the United States, the lower incidence of serious contradictions between them in this region compared to Europe and the Post-Soviet space, as well as the existence of common interests. However, this opportunity was missed as the Asia Pacific became instead another theater of U.S.-Russian new systemic confrontation. Nonetheless, the two sides might still benefit if they succeed in separating their relations in the Asia Pacific from the general bilateral confrontation. Russia can create a favorable environment to continue the role of independent power center, help reduce polarization in the region, and prevent unnecessary tensions between the United States and its Asian allies and partners.

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**Key words:** Asia Pacific, China, Russia, New Cold War, United States

鉴于亚太地区对俄罗斯和美国的重要性，两国在该地区比起双方在欧洲和后苏联地区的严重矛盾较少。又基于共同利益的存在，美俄关于亚太地区的对话本来可以成为两国积极合作的重要支柱，并增强两国关系的可持续性。自2011年以来，尤其是自2014年以来，两国关系原本可以因此有所缓和。不过这个机会错过了，亚太地区反而成为了美国与俄罗斯系统性新对抗的另一个战场。不过，如果双方成功地将亚太地区的两国关系从全面的双边对抗中抽离出来，双方都能受益。这样的结果将为俄罗斯在该地区继续成为独立的权力中心创造有利环境，减少后者的两极分化，防止美国及其亚洲盟友和伙伴之间不必要的关系紧张。

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**关键词:** 亚太地区, 中国, 俄罗斯, 新冷战, 美国

Dada la importancia de la región Asia-Pacífico tanto para Rusia como para Estados Unidos, menos contradicciones serias entre ellos en esta región en comparación con Europa y el espacio postsoviético, así como la existencia de intereses comunes, un diálogo entre Estados Unidos y Rusia acerca de la región Asia-Pacífico podría haberse convertido en un pilar vital de su cooperación positiva y de una mayor sustentabilidad de sus relaciones, capaz de suavizar su deterioro desde 2011 y especialmente desde 2014. Esta

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oportunidad se perdió y la región Asia-Pacífico se convirtió en otro teatro de la confrontación sistémica entre Rusia y EE. UU. Sin embargo, ambas partes se beneficiarían si logran separar sus relaciones con la región Asia-Pacífico de la confrontación bilateral. Un resultado así podría crear un ambiente favorable para que Rusia continúe en su papel de centro de poder independiente en la región, para que reduzca la polarización de este último y para que prevenga tensiones innecesarias entre los Estados Unidos y sus aliados y socios en Asia.

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**Palabras clave:** Asia-Pacífico, China, Rusia, la nueva Guerra Fría, Estados Unidos

## Introduction

Russia and the United States alike regard the Asia Pacific as the center of gravity of world economy and politics. They consider their active participation in the region existential and did not have such intensive contradictions and rivalry in this part of the world as in Europe or in the former USSR. Moreover, they have been sharing some converging strategic interests in the region, such as preventing Chinese hegemony. However, their relations in and about the Asia Pacific region have traditionally been peripheral to the U.S.-Russian relations agenda, and was limited to separate security issues such as North Korea, and lacking systemic foundation. A U.S.-Russian comprehensive dialogue on the Asia-Pacific has been absent even at when both sides proclaimed their “pivots” to the region, and when their overall relations were not confrontational.

The United States declared what became known as the “pivot” in Autumn 2011 with the publication of “America’s Pacific Century” an article by the then State Secretary Hillary Clinton (2011). This was followed by Barack Obama’s Pacific tour in November that year, when he hosted APEC summit in Honolulu and visited Australia and Indonesia, following which he participated in the ASEAN summit and held a number of bilateral meetings with leaders of Asian states.

Russia proclaimed its own rebalancing to the Pacific, widely known as “turn to the East,” in 2012. In September 2012, it hosted the APEC summit in Vladivostok; in December of the same year President Putin declared in the Annual Address to the Federal Assembly that the “vector of Russian development in the 21st century is development to the East” and that the Asia Pacific is “the most dynamic and vigorous region of the world” (Putin, 2012a). Finally, Putin’s election campaign foreign policy article, outlining his strategy for the next six years of his presidency, suggested that Russia should “catch the Chinese wind in the sails of our economy” (Putin, 2012b).

This was precisely the moment when the initial agenda of the U.S.-Russian “reset” was fulfilled, and the two sides started to think about a new one. Considering the importance of the Asia-Pacific to both Russia and the U.S., the lower number of serious contradictions between them in this region in comparison to Europe and the Post-Soviet space, as well as existence of some crucial common interests, the U.S.-Russian dialogue and cooperation on Asia-Pacific could have become a vital pillar of their positive cooperation. These could have increased sustainability and durability of their relations, preventing or at least

softening their deterioration since 2011 (following the NATO war against Libya) and especially since 2014 (Ukraine crisis and beyond).

The two sides failed to establish this dialogue, and this failure contributed to immense fragility of U.S.-Russia relations and to the pace and depth of their deterioration in the 2010s. Both sides demonstrated strategic short-sightedness and are to be blamed. Still, given the asymmetry of the sides' initial positions in the Asia Pacific which is strongly in the U.S.' favor, as well as the flaws and drawbacks in implementation of Russia's "turn to the East" policy, Moscow bears greater responsibility for this failure, and the reasons are foreign policy inertia, path dependency when it comes to U.S.-Russia relations, and lack of geopolitical imagination.

### **United States' "Rebalancing" and the role of Russia**

The United States has been an integral part of the Asia-Pacific economy and the region has been the centerpiece of its prevailing security system for decades. It has led a "hub and spoke" system of military alliances (Japan, South Korea, Australia, Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan, plus a defense agreement with Taiwan), maintained many partnerships with other states, participated in many regional multilateral arrangements on security matters, such as East Asia Summit, and has had colossal economic relations, interdependence and a history of cooperative relations with China since the 1970s. The task it faced was not just to integrate itself deeper into regional affairs, but to consolidate an economic and security order in the Pacific with a central role for the United States as an indispensable nation and the hub of major economic and security relations, main author of the rules of economic relations and security policies, even as it sought to prevent China from shaping a regional economic and security order that would undermine U.S. leadership in the region and consequently in the world. Managing the challenge from China, which was increasingly perceived as a rival and peer competitor, trying to undermine the major pillars of the U.S. central role in the Pacific, was among the major rationales for the Obama Administration. However, unlike its successor, the Obama team was trying to address this challenge through a combination of containment and engagement instruments, not through containment only. Its ultimate purpose was to ensure China's eventual integration into the U.S.-centric order.

Against this background, former State Secretary Hillary Clinton formulated the purposes of the renewed U.S. strategy in the Pacific along the following six priorities: "strengthening bilateral security alliances; deepening our working relationships with emerging powers, including with China; engaging with regional multilateral institutions; expanding trade and investment; forging a broad-based military presence; and advancing democracy and human rights" (Clinton, 2011). In fact, this was a strategy of shaping the security and economic orders in the Pacific in a way favorable for the United States and led by Washington, and of preventing these orders to be shaped by China. From the outset this strategy had two major pillars – security and economic ones.

The security pillar consisted of strengthening the U.S. "hub and spoke" system of alliances with Japan, South Korea, Philippines, and Australia, and increasing U.S. credibility and impression that Washington is committed and capable

of counter-balancing Chinese power in the region. In this regard, the U.S. negotiated the opening of a new military base in Darwin, Australia, claimed that its defense commitments toward Japan apply to the contested Senkaku island, and tried to revitalize security cooperation with the Philippines. Second, the U.S. developed new security partnerships in the region, especially among countries who were concerned about Chinese assertiveness: Vietnam, India, Indonesia, and Singapore. Third, the United States increased its overall military presence and activism in East and Southeast Asia and notably raised the importance of the latter in its overall Asian strategy. As early as 2011, the United States started to recognize the growing importance of the Indian Ocean and India itself for geopolitics in the Asia-Pacific, thus it intensified security engagement with Southeast Asian states and New Delhi.

Fourth, an important component of the U.S. security agenda was strengthening engagement with regional multilateral institutions, above all ASEAN and ASEAN-related security dialogues, such as ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting-Plus and East Asian Summit. This allowed the United States both to manifest its increased engagement with Southeast Asia, and to position itself as an organic component of regional architecture and processes. Bilateral alliances and U.S. engagement with ASEAN-centric formats were two mutually reinforcing and complementing components of the U.S. security agenda.

The fifth component of the U.S. security policy (and driver for the previous ones) was managing relations with China. The measures described above certainly imply some increase in containment policy. Moreover, since 2011–2012 the Obama Administration explicitly started to regard Chinese military policies as the major determinant of the U.S. defense policy and posture, thus *de facto* recognizing China as a military challenger and No. 1 threat. This approach was manifest already in the Strategic Defense Guidance document published by the Obama Administration in January 2012 (Department of Defense, 2012).

At the same time, the Obama Administration refused to reject engagement with China either and in fact continued the traditional dual approach *vis-à-vis* Beijing, to the disappointment of some of its regional allies, above all Japan. More emphasis on military and diplomatic containment (in response to Chinese ambitions in the South China Sea) coincided with robust attempts to engage Beijing in security dialogue to get it to address the U.S. and its allies' and partners' concerns about Chinese military policies in the region in a cooperative way. The prevailing paradigm in the Obama Administration was that a one-sided policy toward China based on containment only was unacceptable and self-destructive. After all, Washington's intention at that time was to engage China in the U.S.-centric order in the Pacific, not to alienate it and push it away.

The economic pillar of the U.S. "rebalancing" strategy was based on the Trans-Pacific Partnership project, deepening economic dialogues with ASEAN and within ASEAN-centric formats, and, again, management of economic dialogue with China. The Obama Administration regarded the TPP as the central component of the desired economic order in the Pacific. This project was not just about trade liberalization, but essentially about economic governance: regulation, intellectual property, investments and management of production chains.

With these rules it hoped to make the regional economic order beneficial for the United States with more relative economic gains in its favor: the existing rules were favoring others, above all China. Beijing's exclusion from the TPP negotiations was not supposed to cut it from the U.S.-centric order forever and produce a fragmented order in the region. On the contrary, the United States expected TPP, whose original 12 member-states accounted for 40% of global GDP, to become so dominant and attractive in terms of regulating economic relations in the Pacific, that China would have no alternative but to eventually join it.

Thus, Washington was trying to avoid the emergence of a China-centric economic order in the Pacific, which excludes the U.S. Establishment of the TPP was supposed to intensify economic interdependence and activism between Asian countries and the United States in a way favorable for U.S. business, and eventually to establish a U.S.-centric economic order in the Pacific based, as President Obama said himself, "on the rules written in Washington."

What was completely absent in the United States', thinking about the Pacific at that time was Russia. It was not because of an intention to exclude Russia: rather, Russia was not perceived as a being present on the regional chessboard. Given Russian marginal position in the region at that time, it was fully understandable, however short-sighted. By 2011, Russia had already established a solid strategic partnership with China, and Moscow-Beijing bilateral relations were among the best both sides were having at that time, especially among great powers. This factor alone should have worked as a wake-up call to the United States, but it did not. Moreover, Russian intentions to play a more active role in the Asia-Pacific were already visible: it joined the East Asian summit together with the United States in 2010, was taking an increasingly active stance in APEC and was planning to hold its summit in Vladivostok in 2012.

One of the major reasons behind U.S. failure to regard Russia as a substantial player in the Pacific is the deep belief among many of U.S. foreign policy elite, that Russia and China are natural rivals, rather than partners, let alone allies, and that they are doomed to conflicts of interest and confrontation sooner rather than later. Russian-Chinese rapprochement of 2000s and 2010s was, in their mind, a temporary "marriage of convenience," caused by artificial, rather than natural reasons (namely, their mutual desire to undermine the U.S. role in Central Asia and resist its hegemonic ambitions and policy globally), and will inevitably collapse. Although more balanced and comprehensive opinion on Russian-Chinese relations exists in the U.S. academia (Bolt & Cross, 2018), the thinking described above is widely spread among many Western, including American, policy-related publications (Lo, 2008, 2015; Lo & Hill, 2013; Putz, 2016; Shapiro, 2017; Wood, 2018). It is also shared by leading American decision makers. Speaking at the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue the U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis described Russian-Chinese relations as "natural nonconvergence of interest" (Mattis, 2018). In his view "it is objective fact that Russia has more in common with Western Europe and the United States than they have in common with China. I believe China has more in common with Pacific Ocean nations and the United States and India than they have in common with Russia" (Mattis, 2018).

This paradigm is based on several factors. First, the growing asymmetry between Russia and China in economic and demographic areas, which should make Russia fearful and wary of its eastern giant. The Russian economy is about

six times smaller than the Chinese, and with economic stagnation in Russia but still very high growth rates in China (6.7% in 2016), this gap is getting bigger every year. Already by the early 2010s the structure of Russian trade with China became similar to its trade with the EU, with Russia supplying raw materials and importing manufactured goods, machines and added value products. Demographic contrast between an overpopulated China and Russia's neighboring regions inhabited by just 6.3 million people after having lost a quarter of its population after the collapse of the USSR, is also striking. Militarily Russia preserves its nuclear weapons preponderance and technological advantage in conventional military power, but the gap between Russia and China is quickly shrinking. According to SIPRI, the Chinese defense budget as of 2017 was more than three times bigger than the Russian one (228 billion vs. 66.3 billion USD).

This growing asymmetry, according to many American analysts and politicians, should push Russia to start hedging and even balancing against China, limiting major avenues of cooperation and intensifying relations with the West as a source of protection. According to some Western observers, Moscow already took measures to limit Chinese economic "expansion" to the Russian market, especially in the Far East, and intentionally slowed down implementation of the special economic zones along the Russian-Chinese border (Rousseau, 2013).

Second is the the problematic history of Sino-Russian and especially Sino-Soviet relations. According to China's official view, Russia acted as a typical Western imperial power in late 19th and early 20th century. With the exception of the 1950s, Chinese-Soviet relations were hostile during most of the Cold War (from 1960s up to late 1980s), culminating in a direct military clash in 1969 at Damansky island.

Third is the common neighborhood that Russia and China share – Central Asia – and the quick increase in Chinese economic penetration into this region, traditionally regarded by Moscow as its backyard. As of 2018, China has surpassed Russia as the major trade partner of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan – three out of five Central Asian countries. Followed by increase in Chinese political influence, this economic expansion, according to U.S. prevailing narrative, will inevitably cause Russian-Chinese geopolitical rivalry in Central Asia quite similar to the Russia-Western one over Ukraine and other Western parts of the former USSR.

All this contrasts with the intensity and richness of U.S.-Chinese relations, which both sides unquestionably consider more important, than their ties with Russia. U.S.-Chinese trade in goods turnover is US\$635 billion, and both sides regard their economic relations as vital for their own development and prosperity. Former U.S. Treasury head Lawrence Summers famously described U.S.-Chinese economic relations as "mutually assured financial destruction" and "balance of financial terror" (Rapkin & Thompson, 2013, pp. 129, 201). Politically the United States and China consider their partnership vital for managing many global challenges such as the world economy and international economic relations, finance, climate change, as well as ensuring free maritime navigation in the Pacific, on which both nations vastly depend. Finally, despite demanding a greater authority and decision-making role, China remains vitally interested in preservation of the liberal world economic order, above all the free trade system

established by the United States and based to a big extent on American-led regimes and institutions.

As a result, the United States has cultivated a sense that a Russian-Chinese opposition to the U.S. global leadership, hegemony and regional presence, although irritating, should not be considered as a grave strategic threat requiring a separate policy. Beijing, the argument holds, will not risk aggravating its ties with Washington for the sake of some global “anti-American” coalition with Moscow.

Although some of these arguments may be correct by their own merit, this narrative as a whole is false, especially in a wider context. It overestimates the negative consequences of Russian-Chinese rising asymmetry and ignores their ability to manage it, as well as many objective common interests that Moscow and Beijing share. This management was truly remarkable and perhaps even unique in contemporary international relations: there is no hint for this asymmetry in the Russian-Chinese official dialogue, and both sides carefully follow the diplomatic parity and equality principle.

The idea of a Russian-Chinese rivalry in Central Asia misses the fact that expansion of Chinese trade with local states and the latter’s indebtedness to China does not undermine the major pillars of Russian influence in the region: Eurasian Economic Union, Collective Security Treaty Organization and Central Asian states’ dependence on the Russian labor market. China has never asked Central Asians to choose between itself and Russia, or questioned their participation in Russia-centric institutions. Both Russia and China benefit from political stability and economic development of Central Asia and consider their policies as contributing to this in a complementary way; and both are interested in reducing U.S. presence and influence in the region.

Finally, the skeptical arguments ignore the fact that Chinese political and strategic dependence on Russia is no less than Russian dependence on China. Russia is for China the only truly friendly great power and the only truly friendly neighbor. If Russia turns back to West-centric foreign policy or its relations with Beijing deteriorate, China would become encircled by unfriendly powers, which would become a geopolitical nightmare. As a result, Beijing is likely to continue courting Moscow even if asymmetry between them is exacerbated (Krickovic, 2017).

One should note that an opposite opinion exists in American discourse as well: one which overestimates the dangers of Russian-Chinese partnership and presents it as a systemically and ideologically anti-Western and anti-U.S. alliance (Rozman, 2014; Schoen & Kaylan, 2014). One can hardly agree with this conclusion for several reasons. First, it ignores the objective scale of Chinese dependence on the United States and on the U.S.-led liberal economic order and its unwillingness to form any systemic opposition to it. Second, it misses the full-fledged commitment of both Russia and China to strategic independence and roles as independent power centers, not restrained by any sort of great power alliance.

### **Russian “Turn to the East” and the role of the United States**

There is a widespread opinion among Western scholars and politicians that Russia’s “turn to the East” was just a reaction to deterioration of its relations

with the West, which happened in 2014 and turned out to be much deeper and longer than some in Moscow had originally anticipated. From this perspective Russia would easily revise this policy as soon as its relations with the U.S. and the EU improve again. However, this is unlikely to happen. Moscow initiated its rebalancing toward Asia two years before the Ukraine crisis as a reaction to the general economic and political power redistribution, with the Pacific objectively becoming the centerpiece of the world economy and international political affairs.

Like the United States, Russia understood that preservation and strengthening of its status and role as an independent global power center would depend on its participation in the regional processes, whereas isolation from the Pacific creates a risk of global marginalization. However, as an outsider and newcomer to the region, Russian ambitions and strategy were much more modest than those of the United States. In general, it had three major pillars: further strengthening strategic partnership with China; intensifying relations with other Asian countries and multilateral institutions, thus positioning Russia as an independent Pacific player rather than a Chinese ally; and an overarching pillar and priority – developing the Russian Far East, which was by that time the last underdeveloped region in the Pacific.

Russian desire to strengthen strategic partnership with China further was absolutely natural and predetermined by several factors. First was geographic proximity: the Russian-Chinese border is the second longest border for Russia after the one with Kazakhstan. The second was Chinese remarkable rise (the central reason behind Asia Pacific becoming central to world economy and politics, and behind the overall power shift in the world) and China becoming the main economic partner for the majority of Asian countries. In 2010, China surpassed Germany Russia's as major trade partner. The third was the logical implication of the first and the second ones: as the regional economic superpower, it was natural that China would play a crucial role in development of the Russian Far East – more than any other player in the Pacific. The fourth factor was Moscow's intention to manage the growing Russian-Chinese asymmetry and develop a new level and rules of strategic partnership before power shifts in Chinese favor too much. Finally, Russia and China share multiple common interests both at global level (collaboration in the UN Security Council, reform of global governance institutions, resisting U.S. hegemonic ambitions and policies such as regime change, etc.) and regional level (ensuring political stability and economic development of Central Asia, weakening United States' position there).

At the same time, Russia made it very clear that its "turn to Asia" was not just a turn to China. The latter would have made Moscow Beijing's junior partner, thus jeopardizing Russian major foreign policy tradition and its identity as an independent global player enjoying parity and equality with other global centers of power. Alexander Lukin, one of the leading academics focusing on Russian-Chinese relations, provides excellent analyses of the logic of Russian "pivot to Asia" and of Beijing's place in it in his book "China and Russia: The New Rapprochement" (Lukin, 2018a, 2018b). Positioning itself as an independent power in the Pacific, not as an ally of China, certainly required intensification of relations with other Asian states (Japan, South Korea, India, ASEAN

member-states) and multilateral institutions, above all ASEAN-centric structures (Korolev, 2016). However, the China factor and other limitations (such as its territorial dispute with Japan) prevented Moscow from going too far in strengthening relations with these countries, many of which were increasingly fearful of Chinese power and its hegemonic potential. As Russia was balancing between China and other Asian countries, unlike the United States, it was unable to take a clear position on many of the acute security issues of the Pacific, such as territorial disputes and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. Its approach was doomed to be neutral with some rhetorical (but not substantial) sympathy for the Chinese approach.

The development of the Far East and Russia as a whole as a result of its greater integration into the regional processes was the major economic rationale of its “turn to the East” policy. There was a growing understanding that this vast territory, historically considered as deep periphery, outskirts, a closed fortress, underdeveloped and increasingly depopulated, would become a huge liability for the Russian state, and over time perhaps even a source of severe troubles in relations with neighbors, including China. Or it could become a powerful driver of economic development and a factor of Russian strength in the 21st century. With the development gap between the Russian Far East and majority of other Asian territories getting bigger, there was no time for delay. Rapid development of this region was becoming not just a matter of Russian positioning of itself as a global great power, but a question of territorial integrity and survival. These questions were truly inseparable, and both necessitated economic development of the Far East. It was impossible for Russia to play a full-fledged role in the Pacific, thus ensuring its global status in the Pacific-centric international system, while its Pacific territories remained backward and underdeveloped.

At the same time, it was clear that domestic Russian resources were drastically insufficient for ensuring successful development of the Far Eastern regions, and that the best way to do that was integrating them into regional processes, drawing the Pacific nations in and using their capital, technology and markets as external sources of development. This required attracting foreign investment, increasing connectivity between the Russian Far East and other Pacific territories, as well as the European parts of Russia (Eurasian transit), and building up exports from the Far Eastern regions to the Asian countries with demand for energy and agriculture. Boosting development of the Far East with the help of the Asia Pacific economies in turn could become a new powerful engine of development for Russia as a whole, inasmuch as Russia’s earlier model of economic recovery that depended on energy exports to Europe was by 2011–2012 largely exhausted.

In addition to multiple domestic economic and administrative decisions aimed at improving investment attractiveness of the Far East and its openness and accessibility for foreign investors, a fundamental shift in perception of the land was required from periphery and fortress to a major frontier and the second center of gravity after the European part of Russia. In foreign policy, implementation of this idea demanded very active engagement with the Pacific countries – the more the better – and adopting a series of bilateral and multilateral agreements on trade, investment and economic relations, participation in multilateral connectivity and economic cooperation initiatives in the Pacific

driven by APEC and ASEAN and, above all, maintaining balance between China and the rest in terms of their role in Far East development. It was very important for Russia to avoid Chinese unilateral domination of the development projects.

However, implementation of this policy was slow, disorganized and insufficient. After the 2012 APEC summit in Vladivostok was over, Moscow's attention to the region visibly declined. Other "mega projects" came to the fore, such as preparation for the Olympic Games in Sochi in 2014. Russia failed to appoint a permanent ambassador to ASEAN for a long time, and the Russian president was regularly missing the East Asian summits, sending either, the prime minister or foreign minister instead. Because of lack of experience, cultural differences and prevailing Euro-centric orientation among the Russian business elites, it was quite slow in promoting development projects and attracting investments from Asian states and companies. The Ministry for Far Eastern Development was established in May 2012, but at the start its performance was hardly efficient. According to prominent Russian experts, the major product of its performance in more than a year was the state program SocioEconomic Development of the Russian Far East and the Baikal Region, which was approved in March 2013, but which just half a year later was officially recognized as outdated, mainly because of serious flaws in the document (Karaganov, 2014).

In terms of Russian exports to the region the main emphasis was given to energy. The Russian government did try to promote agricultural exports and position Far East as an agricultural reservoir for Asia Pacific, but with poor success – despite the growing demand for food and hydroscopic products in China and some other Asian countries.

The resolution of the Russian-Japanese territorial dispute was stalling, thus impeding diversification of Russian relations in Asia and limiting its cooperation with one of the other key players of the region. Among the Southeast Asian states Russia managed to substantially intensify its economic and security (arms sales) partnership with Vietnam. It was particularly important as a manifestation of Moscow's autonomy from Beijing on the regional matters, and Beijing did not hesitate to state its disappointment with the growing Russian-Vietnamese partnership, including in the South China Sea. Still, relations with other regional players remained relatively low – despite Russian efforts to intensify arms supplies to Thailand, Laos, Indonesia and Malaysia – also against evident protests from China. Relations with India were developing in a quite successful and consistent way, but were largely detached from the wider Asian context and kept as predominantly bilateral.

As a result of these and some other deficiencies of Russia's "turn to the East" implementation, many Asian states simply did not consider it serious and thus did not view Moscow as a reliable and credible partner. Moreover, since much of the real substance of Russian economic and political relations with Asia was in fact its bilateral ties with China, many regional states started to view Russia as China's junior partner or a sort of participant of a tandem with China, rather than an independent great power. Indeed, Russian trade with China was more than twice as big as its trade with other Asian countries altogether; China was

the major partner in Far Eastern development projects; and Moscow's political dialogue with Beijing was far more intensive and foreign policy coordination far closer than with any other state in Asia Pacific. Since many states of the region had increasingly tense political relations with China, such a perception substantially undermined Russian position and implementation of its "turn."

Finally, such an imbalance in Russian Asian policy toward China and lack of real substance of the other components of the "turn to the East" strategy, especially during its initial stages, contributed to the U.S. perception of Russia as an essentially European country with little to do with the Pacific. The United States simply did not pay attention to Russian rhetoric and actions about its "turn to the East" and regarded them as not serious. As Russia analysts Bobo Lo and Fiona Hill put it, "Unfortunately for Putin, Moscow has limited capacity to make its pivot dreams a reality," adding that "In short, Russia's pivot is not so much policy as talk" (Lo & Hill, 2013). As for the progress in Russian-Chinese relations, the United States did not consider it durable and sustainable as it believed in an inevitable Russian-Chinese deterioration. Thus, it did not think that this strengthening was a serious challenge, let alone a threat requiring a separate Pacific policy toward Russia. As Lo and Hill conclude, "over the long term, the economic and political gap between a dynamic China and a nonmodernizing Russia will be too wide for Moscow to bridge in the Asia-Pacific. ... Looking beyond Russia's current pivotal moment, it is more likely than not to find itself disillusioned once more, caught between an East to which it does not belong and a West in which it does not easily fit." (Lo & Hill, 2013).

If the U.S. failure to consider Russia in their "pivot," although shortsighted, could at least partly be justified by the marginal role Moscow was playing in the Pacific, especially beyond China, the Russian failure to attribute a prominent role to the United States in its own "turn" is an unforgivable mistake. Indeed, the U.S. dimension in the Russian strategy was strikingly not commensurate to the major role America was playing in the Pacific economy and security systems. Even if Russia did not support much of the U.S. security and economic policy in the region, it was still doomed to face the U.S. factor and presence in almost every dimension and issue in the Pacific.

Strategically Russian failure to establish a dialogue with the United States on the Pacific diminished Russian ability to position itself as an independent power in region and convey to others its wish to be recognized as such. It also reduced the potential of Russian cooperation with U.S. allies and partners in the Pacific, which constitute a majority of the countries of the region. Thus, Russia increased its unilateral dependence on China (which, incidentally, had a very intensive dialogue with the United States) and strengthened the others' suspicions that it is not truly independent in its Pacific policy.

Tactically Russian failure to allocate a role for the United States in its "turn to the East" policy deprived it of some important benefits it could obtain through cooperation with Washington, the most important being American investments into the Russian Far East and encouragement of U.S. allies and partners to accelerate their participation in these projects. This could have substantially increased effectiveness of the Russian attempts to sustain a balance of foreign investors into projects in the Far East.

Most probably, this was a result of foreign policy thinking rigidity and lack of imagination. A U.S.-Russian dialogue on the Pacific would indeed have been very untraditional from the perspective of the conventional agenda of U.S.-Russian relations, centered on strategic stability, international security, Europe and the post-Soviet space. Policymakers in Moscow – either those running the Asian agenda, or those dealing with the United States – did not consider the Pacific as a promising agenda and certainly failed to present a U.S.-Russian dialogue on the region as Moscow's important foreign policy interest and preference. This is a vivid illustration of severe illness of both U.S.-Russian relations and Russian policy toward the United States and particularly of their detachment from important trends of global development. If U.S.-Russian relations were healthy, they would have definitely followed the global trend of the Pacific becoming the centerpiece of global economy and politics, and foreign policy evolution characterized by a “turn to the East.”

Thus, the U.S. and Russian “pivots” to the Pacific, although different in ambitions and scale, had three things in common: they were based on perception of the region's centrality in global economy and politics; they happened at the same time; and they lacked a dialogue between themselves. Neither the United States nor Russia saw each other in the Pacific as potential, let alone preferential, partners, and failed to consider their dialogue on the Pacific as a part of the U.S.-Russia relations agenda – at a time when this agenda was drastically needed.

### **Russian and U.S. interests in the Pacific**

Could a hypothetical U.S.-Russian dialogue on the Pacific, if it had been launched during the upswing period of their relations, become a stabilizer? To answer this question one needs to analyze their converging and diverging interests toward the region and where to strike a balance. The resulting picture is complex, as both common and clashing interests exist and are important. Some factors such as the role of China unite and separate Russia and the United States at the same time (Mankoff & Barabanov, 2013). Still, common interests prevail.

First, both Russia and the United States are interested in economic and security orders in the Pacific being inclusive and open for non-Asian nations, such as themselves. A strictly Asian or Asia-centric order, dominated either by China alone, or by China, Japan and India would be unfavorable for both Moscow and Washington, as they would be sidelined to a marginal role. For Russia as an indigenously marginal player in the region, this would be even more dramatic.

Second, Russia and the U.S. share an objective and important interest of avoiding Chinese hegemony in the region. For the United States, a China-dominated Asia would pose the gravest strategic threat whatsoever, similar to a Soviet-dominated Europe after the Second World War. Preventing key regions from being dominated by uncontrollable, let alone rival and adversarial, powers, has been the primary priority of U.S. grand strategy in the last one hundred years and the reason for the United States to go into wars, including First World War, Second World War, and the Cold War.

For Russia as a weaker power, avoiding Chinese hegemony is perhaps even more important. First, a China-dominated Asia would prevent Russia from being an independent power in this region and restrict it to a marginal subordinated

role. Second, consolidation of Chinese hegemony in Asia would create temptation for Beijing to try to pursue an increasingly hegemonic policy toward Russia itself. This would pose the gravest threat to Russian-Chinese relations: Russia would be compelled to start counter-balancing and containing. As of now the major source of the positive state and durability of Russian-Chinese partnership is that Beijing is avoiding any allusions to hegemony and superiority to Moscow: it emphasizes equality in bilateral relations, avoids challenging Russia-centric institutions in Central Asia and agrees to develop economic and security orders in Eurasia jointly with Russia (the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and coordinated development of the Eurasian Economic Union and China's One Belt-One Road initiative). If this state of affairs changes, Russian-Chinese relations would face real troubles, even outright hostility, which many U.S. experts predict and anticipate.

However, weakening and destroying U.S. hegemony in Asia-Pacific is no less vital for Russia, than preventing a Chinese one, and so far this creates a fruitful space for Russian-Chinese cooperation.

Third, both sides are interested in preventing aggravation of conflicts in the region, including those in the South China Sea. This aggravation, let alone direct military clashes and war, would jeopardize economic growth of Asia, vital routes of global trade, and possibly trigger a deep world economic crisis, from which both Russia and the United States would suffer.

Fourth, Moscow and Washington are interested in management of the North Korean nuclear weapons problem, and neither prefers escalation. The reasons each side has are different. For Russia, an unresolved North Korean nuclear weapons issue justifies the increase of U.S. military presence in North-East Asia, which Moscow does not support. Escalation might result in even greater U.S. military presence and eventual elimination of the North Korean state, which will move the U.S. presence even closer to China and Russia. For the U.S., development of a North Korean nuclear program is a challenge to credibility: America's continued inability to resolve it undermines its ambitions to be a global leader and hub of security in the Pacific. On the other hand, aggravation might even destroy the U.S.-centric system in Northeast Asia, as both Japan and South Korea would suffer greatly and might accuse the United States of sacrificing their interests and security for the sake of American ambitions.

Fifth, Russia and the United States both support multilateral ASEAN-centric fora and are interested in their centrality in regional security architecture and economic processes. Russian interest is more genuine, since their centrality would create a better chance for Moscow to play a role in Pacific affairs. Although Washington is more interested in promoting U.S.-centric arrangements, it still supports the ASEAN-centric ones in order to avoid aggravating the majority of regional players, for whom these forums are very important, and in order to prevent China from gradually acquiring regional dominance. Russia shares the latter interest as well. Neither of them is interested in marginalization of these multilateral arrangements nor in Chinese unilateral leadership in them.

Diverging U.S. and Russian interests, on the other hand, largely center around the U.S. role and place in the region and in its security architecture and economic order. The U.S.-centric order in the Pacific is as unfavorable for Russia as a Chinese one (or even more – given troublesome bilateral relations in general),

as both doom Moscow to a marginal position. Thus, Russia is generally critical of the U.S.-led system of defense alliances in Asia, of American attempts to broaden the web of partnerships to other Asian states, and it was initially suspicious of the TPP.

Moscow and Washington clearly favor different security architectures in Asia. For Russia preservation of the U.S. alliances after the end of the Cold War was perceived as an attempt to consolidate unipolarity and U.S. global leadership, which sharply contradict the Russian vision of a desired world order. The alliance system also works to prevent or slow down the rise of new power centers, above all China, and the general power shift from the West to non-West. The only exception is U.S. alliance with South Korea, which is regarded as related to the North Korean challenge, and thus justified. In contrast, the U.S.-Japanese alliance is viewed with suspicion as a part of the United States' containment of China and hegemonic policies. If this U.S.-centric hub-and-spokes system prevails in the regional security order, Russia is automatically pushed to the sidelines – just as with the NATO-centric security order in Europe. The implications on their relations with China are mixed. On the one hand, their existence certainly prevents Chinese hegemony. But on the other hand they contribute to continued polarization of the Pacific into a U.S.-centric and China-centric part, which also marginalizes Russia. Russia has to be in this context either an outsider or a Chinese junior partner.

Russia is even more upset with U.S. attempts to broaden its system of allies and partners to include such countries as India, Vietnam, and Indonesia. First, this expands the U.S.-centric security order in the Pacific, thus automatically marginalizing Russia even more. Second, this expansion aggravates the U.S.-Chinese rivalry and general polarization of the Pacific, makes it an arena of sharp competition, which also dooms Russia to a marginal role. Third, it aggravates conditions of Russian relations with these countries themselves, which have traditionally been major importers of Russian weapons, military equipment and economic partners as well. With the U.S. outreach, competition for their markets profoundly increases, and the overall importance of their economic and political relations with Moscow goes down.

At the same time, the intensity and importance of the U.S.-Russian contradictions over security order in the Pacific are much less than those in Europe or especially in the Post-Soviet space. The formation of a new non-block security architecture in the Euro-Atlantic with a full-fledged Russian participation has been among its major foreign policy priorities since the early 1990s, and the struggle against NATO expansion has dominated much of Russian foreign policy since 1994. Expansion of the U.S.-led security order in Europe was at the center of each of the major crisis of U.S.-Russia relations for the whole post-Cold War period. In Asia, their contradictions have been less acute. Partly this is due to historical reasons and because traditionally Europe played a far greater role in Russian security concerns and U.S.-Russia relations, than Asia. Partly it is because the U.S.-led security system in Europe is consolidated within NATO, whereas in Asia there is a much less unified system of bilateral alliances. Finally, unlike in Europe, the U.S. security system in Asia has not been expanding in the post-Cold War period, especially to regions of vital importance to Russia.

Even prior to Trump Russia is also not interested in a U.S.-centric economic order in the Pacific, whether is it centered on the TPP or on something else. Despite the possibility that some of the TPP provisions could play a positive role for Russian modernization, the very fact that they were elaborated in an exclusive way with Moscow and Beijing being cut from the negotiations, guaranteed a negative attitude. Moreover, creation of multilateral U.S.-led economic projects without China contributes to economic polarization of the Pacific, which is also against Russian interests as it increases its dependence on China. As with security field, Russia supports consolidation of an inclusive economic order in the Pacific (such as a one based on APEC) that would maintain a balance between several centers of power and prevent a hegemony of a single player. Naturally, as the U.S. intensified efforts to consolidate American-centric economic and security orders in the Pacific, Russian criticism of them was getting stronger.

Another important U.S.-Russian contradiction in the region relates to missile defense. In particular, Russia is critical of U.S. deployment of missile defense system in Japan. On the one hand, this is a spillover of their general clash on this issue. After the U.S.' unilateral withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in 2002, Russia has been considered its missile defense policy as threatening to strategic stability in the longer-term prospect. The logic is that without any restrictions Washington might eventually build a system that could be able to challenge Russian second strike capability, which is considered as prerequisite of stability and absence of war between Moscow and Washington and manifestation of Russian exclusive great power status. Such approach also allows Russia to abstain from further reductions of nuclear weapons and maintain vast nuclear preponderance above everyone except the United States, which is also vital for Russian security and great power status.

Despite profound modernization of Russian strategic nuclear forces in recent years and successful construction of weapons allegedly capable of overcoming any hypothetical missile defense systems (such a hypersonic nuclear armed missiles), proclaimed by Vladimir Putin in March 2018 Address to the Federal Assembly (Putin, 2018), Moscow continues to criticize all U.S. missile defense infrastructure, especially those close to Russian borders, as destabilizing and threatening. Moreover, deployments of U.S. missile defense infrastructure are part and parcel of the general expansion of the U.S. military presence and strengthening of U.S.-led security orders in key regions, which Russia perceives negatively in general. Finally, these deployments constitute different regional branches of one and the same U.S. global missile defense system, centrally controlled by Washington and operated by U.S. the military only.

On the other hand, the China factor is also important for Russian criticism of the U.S. missile defense policy in Asia. This is not just about Russian solidarity with its major strategic partner. American missile defense deployments in Japan and South Korea (Russia is less critical about the latter, but still has a negative attitude) provoke arms race, and push China to increase defense spending even more and expand and improve its nuclear weapons program. This decreases Russia's military advantage over China and eventually compels Moscow to take steps that it would ideally prefer to avoid.

Last but not the least, Russia and the United States disagree about ways to resolve the North Korean nuclear problem and the desired outcome. Russia fully

understands the DPRK's position that after United States' attacks against Iraq and Libya, a unilateral denuclearization would be an act of utmost insanity and a death sentence. This suggests that management of this issue would be slow, difficult and requiring balanced compromises from both sides, including the United States.

In the medium-term prospect Moscow seems to be ready to embrace an option whereby DPRK limits, not eliminates, its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs in exchange for credible concessions from the United States, such as diplomatic recognition, guarantees of nonaggression and rejection of regime change policy, partial abolition of sanctions and partial reduction of U.S. military presence near North Korea. This option, although acceptable for Pyongyang, is undesirable for Washington, as would look like a its unilateral concession that would undermine America's credibility in the eyes of its regional allies, above all Japan and South Korea. Thus, under the Trump Administration, the U.S. insists on North Korea dismantling its nuclear and missile programs in exchange for a direct bilateral dialogue and its better tone, not such material concessions as reduction of the U.S. military presence in Northeast Asia.

In the long-term prospect Russia prefers a scenario whereby DPRK denuclearizes completely and irreversibly, but survives as an independent player with the existing political regime, and whereby the United States takes measures to convince Pyongyang and other interested players (China and Russia), that an attack against it is not just absent from the agenda, but difficult to implement in practice. The latter presumes a fundamental revision of the military-political situation in Northeast Asia: substantial reduction of U.S. military presence and elaboration of an inclusive collective security system with Chinese, Russian, and North Korean participation.

Such a development might persuade Japan and South Korea to obtain a nuclear deterrent of their own. Indeed, reduction of U.S. military presence, its security guarantees and recognition of North Korea, would make Tokyo and Seoul increasingly vulnerable and suspicious of not just DPRK itself, but also (and mainly) of China. Under conditions of the U.S. retrenchment China might intensify its assertive and hegemonic policies further, so Japan and South Korea would have to counter-balance it themselves. However, there are grounds to think that such an option for Russia could be acceptable. Independent Japanese and South Korean nuclear weapons would not just undermine the U.S. alliances system in Asia that Moscow does not like, but also put substantial limits to Chinese hegemonic ambitions, and create a truly multipolar great power balance in Northeast Asia, which Moscow considers most favorable for its interests. Indeed, such a great power balance in the region would simplify the task of Russia to become another Asian great power and even create a demand for its participation as a balancer.

For the United States, these preferences and scenarios are unacceptable and seem to be purposefully anti-American. Washington prefers a solution which would preserve its alliances with Japan and South Korea and strengthen its leadership, not undermine it, and thus demands denuclearization of North Korea without any linkages to U.S. military posture in the region. Since Washington does not support the idea of its alliances being replaced with a collective security

system in Northeast Asia, it does not perceive Russia as a preferential partner in management of the North Korean problem, especially so after the Trump Administration embraced direct negotiations with Pyongyang.

### **What a U.S.-Russian cooperation agenda in the Pacific could have looked like**

This analysis shows a complex balance of converging and diverging interests of Russia and the United States in the Pacific. Despite the diverging ones being quite serious, the overall balance is still in favor of the convergence ones, which seem to be more fundamental and long-term. The situation in the Pacific is still drastically different from the balance of U.S. and Russian interests in Europe, post-Soviet space or even the Middle East, where diverging interests clearly prevail. This means that with some imagination, courage and political will, Moscow and Washington could have made their dialogue on the Asia-Pacific a prominent component of their relations agenda and a pillar of positive cooperation, thus creating an important source of their relations' sustainability (The US and Russia in the Asia-Pacific, 2016).

In particular, both sides could have coordinated their efforts to promote Russia's economic and political relations with U.S. allies and partners in the region, thus reducing Moscow's unilateral dependence on China and hedging against Beijing's hegemonic policies in the region. This is a clear common interest for both Russia and the United States. Resolution of the Russian-Japanese territorial dispute and deepening of their relations should have been one of the major dimensions of this priority, especially since it was (and is up to now) actively supported by Tokyo. Establishment of Russia-U.S.-Japan and Russia-U.S.-South Korea trilateral dialogues would have reduced Russian economic and political dependence on China, increased Japan's and Korea's role in development of Russia's Siberia and Far East, and strengthened Russian role in the Pacific independently of China.

The United States and Russia could have also intensified Russian participation in U.S.-centric multilateral security arrangements in the Pacific, such as the RIMPAC military exercises. Russia took part in them just once in 2012; its participation in 2014 was excluded following the Ukraine crisis and beginning of the new U.S.-Russian confrontation. The two sides could agree on making Russian participation permanent. Russia and the United States could have also intensified coordination at the ASEAN-centric multilateral security forums, since both sides were interested in ASEAN's survival and strengthening and were paying lip service to promoting their centrality in the regional security order.

In addition, both could have established bilateral and multilateral dialogues (including U.S. allies and partners in the region) on security order in the Pacific in general, including the China factor. This dialogue should have coexisted with a strong Russian-Chinese security partnership, thus reducing the overall polarization of the Pacific into a U.S.-centric and China-centric sub-orders. A more prominent Russian role and U.S.-Russian dialogue on the Pacific could have even mitigated the growing U.S.-Chinese rivalry. Over time, the sides could have established a trilateral U.S.-Russian-Chinese dialogue on security order in

the Pacific, which would have been a game changer for the region for the better, preventing its polarization and U.S.-Chinese strategic rivalry.

A web of more intensive security dialogues with the United States and its Pacific allies and partners, if combined with preservation of the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership and development at later stages of more inclusive U.S.-Russian-Chinese and multilateral security formats, could have diminished Russian suspiciousness and opposition to the U.S.-centric security architecture in the region. At the same time, active security cooperation between Russia and such Asian countries suspicious of Chinese hegemonic ambitions in the region, as India and Japan, could have allowed the United States to reduce its own contribution to counterbalancing China and put more emphasis on the efforts conducted by its regional allies and partners. This could make its military posture in the Pacific less costly and more balanced – much along the lines of the “offshore balancing” strategies advocated by leading American realists (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2016). Despite regional actors’ rather high ability to contain and counterbalance China, they are usually underestimated by American policy planners (Beckley, 2017). A more robust Russian cooperation with U.S. allies and partners could have made the latter even more capable, thus mitigating the most fundamental contradiction between Moscow and Washington in the Pacific: Russian suspiciousness of and opposition to the network of U.S.-centric security alliances.

The United States itself could have played an important role in promoting economic development of Russia’s Siberia and the Far East as a provider of investments, knowhow and technologies, and taking benefit from development of this last remaining Pacific frontier (Karaganov & Suslov, 2011). American participation would have balanced Chinese role in regional development, and provided the developmental project with higher standards and better governance rules as well as encouraged U.S. allies and partners to intensify their involvement in the development of Siberia and the Far East.

Finally, Moscow and Washington could have upgraded their cooperation on the North Korean nuclear problem, with Russia providing important economic incentives and security guarantees for Pyongyang’s gradual step-by-step denuclearization.

Such a cooperation agenda for the Pacific might have helped sustain relations when the U.S.-Russian “reset” started to crumble since 2011-2012.

### **Conclusion**

If the U.S.-Russian dialogue on the Pacific had been established in 2011–2013, the stakes of both sides in their bilateral relations and their perception of costs and benefits would have been different. It is quite likely that dialogue and cooperation would have created a mutual sense of importance of the U.S.-Russian relations as a whole, and that U.S. response to the Euromaidan crisis in Ukraine in 2014 would have been different.<sup>1</sup> The two sides would have considered it important to avoid overall confrontation and they might have made an effort to manage that crisis in a cooperative way, rather than taking unilateral steps at the expense of each other.

This opportunity was missed, and the Ukraine crisis sparked a new stage of U.S.-Russia relations – systemic confrontation- which with the Russian military

involvement in the Syrian civil war on the side of Bashar Assad government and U.S. accusations of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. Presidential elections deepened and deteriorated even further, becoming quite reminiscent of a new Cold War (Legvold, 2016). As a result, the United States started to perceive Russia as an apparent adversary that tries to undermine American position and policies in key regions and challenges its leadership globally.

This development impacted U.S.-Russian interaction in the Pacific as well. Although not a source of U.S.-Russian confrontation, the region became another theater (although less fierce than Ukraine, Europe, or the Middle East) where both sides became driven by adversarial logic rather than by objective long-term interests.

Washington under both Presidents Obama and Trump turned to impeding Russia's cooperation with U.S. allies and partners in Asia-Pacific through either political pressure (e.g. Obama Administration insisted on Japan joining anti-Russian sanctions and pressured its Prime Minister Abe to abstain from active dialogue with Vladimir Putin) or through threatening unilateral sanctions for importing Russian arms (as prescribed by Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act adopted in August 2017), thus trying to isolate Russia in the region and weaken its international standing. The Trump Administration's National Security Strategy officially proclaimed Russia and China as its global adversaries (National Security Strategy, 2017).

Moscow, in turn, became very critical of the Trans-Pacific Partnership project during the late Obama era, opposed U.S. policies toward North Korea and the South China Sea during early Trump period, and was quite suspicious of the Trump Administration's flagship project in the region – its Indo-Pacific concept. Russian's "turn to the East" strategy – originally a rational reflection of the shift of the global center of gravity to the Asia Pacific – started to be perceived and presented as an alternative to its relations with the West and a way to compensate for deterioration of ties with the U.S. and the EU. Although Russia tried its best to maintain balance between its relations with China and that with other Asian states – struggling to intensify cooperation with India, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, and other ASEAN states or at least to prevent its decrease- since 2014 the intensity and dynamic of its partnership with China clearly prevailed over its relations with other Asian states.

The spillover of the new U.S.-Russian confrontation to the Pacific is contrary to both sides' strategic interests. It contributes to the general polarization of the region in a Cold War style, which could jeopardize economic development of Pacific countries and is against the interests of nearly all the Pacific countries. This confrontation impacts Russian relations with both U.S. allies in the region (Japan, South Korea, and Australia) and countries that Washington seeks partnership with (India, Vietnam, Indonesia, and some others) in a negative way. They continue to develop now despite American pressure, but if the U.S.-Russian confrontation escalates further, they would certainly suffer. This would undermine Russian desire to play the role of an independent great power in the Pacific and increase its dependence on China, which eventually would create a strong irritant in Russia-Chinese relations.

The new U.S.-Russia confrontation is bound to last a long while (Suslov, 2014) and it will be painful (Trenin, 2016), but its spillover to the Pacific does not serve

American interests, either. United States attempts to limit Russian cooperation with Pacific states and to “isolate” it undermine American power. Russia’s position as an independent great power in the Pacific is fully congruent with the interests of the U.S. allies and partners, who are afraid of a hypothetical Russian-Chinese alliance and prefer Moscow to play a role that is autonomous from Beijing. Finally, the United States itself is not interested in continuous deepening of the Russian-Chinese partnership as it considers China the major strategic rival which is preparing to intensify its political, economic and military capacity for years to come. Beliefs that Russia is doomed to clash with China over Central Asia, that it will become increasingly concerned about rise and over asymmetry in Russian-Chinese relations, and thus will be compelled to return to the Western orbit in the end – although quite popular in Washington today – are misguided. The more intensive is U.S.-Russian confrontation, including in the Pacific, the stronger will be the consolidation of the Eurasian landmass against the United States under Chinese and Russian leadership, and the greater will be the protest against such U.S. policies on the part of American Pacific allies and partners.

Thus, both Russia and the United States would benefit, if they succeed in separating their relations in the Asia-Pacific from the general U.S.-Russian confrontation, which is for is bound to last a good long while. This entails building a nonadversarial relationship in the region without active cooperation (in as much as cooperation unlikely in the observable future), but without outright confrontation either. Both sides should refrain from perceiving actions of the opponent as a-priori negative and from calculating its own interests in automatic opposition to the interests of the other.

U.S. attitude to Russian cooperation with its major allies and partners in the region, including India, Japan and South Korea, should be positively neutral (not publicly encouraging but not torpedoing the engagement either). The common interest of Moscow and Washington in intensifying security, foreign policy and economic ties and cooperation between Russia on the one hand and the U.S. allies and partners in the Pacific on the other hand, greater checks against Chinese hegemonic ambitions in the region, Russia in turn should as much as possible stay detached from U.S.-Chinese clashes over the South China Sea and have separate dialogues with regional countries on security issues. Finally, Russia and the United States should participate in the same multilateral and minilateral strategic talks about security and economic order in the region.

Such an outcome would create a more favorable environment for Russia to continue the role of an independent power center in the Pacific, having balanced relationships with the key regional actors, while not jeopardizing Russian-Chinese strategic partnership. Moreover, it would reduce polarization in the Asia Pacific and prevent its evolution toward a bipolar system dominated by the U.S. and China. Finally, it would create conditions for the gradual convergence and complementarity of two grand projects for the region – the “Indo-Pacific” and “Greater Eurasia.”

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## Note

<sup>1</sup>By the time the Euromaidan crises began, Obama Administration had no political will left to work to sustain US-Russian relations in a positive mode and no understanding why constructive relations with Moscow were necessary. Obama’s decision to cancel his visit to Moscow planned for September 2013 was very illustrative in this regard.

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