

Russia and America in the Asia-Pacific: Will They Ever Move beyond Geopolitics?

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Because of their respective positions in the global international system, Russia and America interact in a number of world regions. The US is a superpower that is present in almost any part of the world. Russia now is “just” a great power, whose influence is no longer global, yet significant enough in a few crucial areas of the world adjacent to Russian borders.

Ever since the early 1940s, it has been Europe acting as the main arena where Moscow’s and Washington’s interests overlap. In addition, Russia - US interaction, mostly competitive, has been actively unfolding in the Caucasus and Central Asia. In the Asia-Pacific region, contact between Russia and America have been comparatively less intense. Yet, this has not always been the case. There were times when developments in the Pacific defined the nature of Russian - American relations. It is quite possible that this may happen once again.

This paper aims to investigate geopolitical factors shaping the dynamics of Russia – US relations in the Pacific. The paper starts by examining a few episodes in history that highlight the nature of Russia – America interaction. The author then proceeds to explore the present state of affairs and make some predictions about the future.

Episode 1. The sale of Alaska: Russia and America versus Britain

Russian – American contacts in the Pacific can be traced back over two hundred years into the past. As early as the late 18th century, two transcontinental flows of Russians and Americans, moving towards each other, came in touch. Initial isolated encounters began to evolve into a fairly stable relationship.¹ However, for a long time this relationship was mainly transnational and economic rather than political. The most important role was played by merchants rather than governments. In other words, this was what is now called “low politics”. The first instance of Russian - American interaction in the Pacific featuring “high politics”, that is involving states’ strategic interests, was the Alaska sale in 1867.

As is well known, the government of Alexander II decided to sell Alaska because it was a financial burden. It was also seen as impossible to defend due to its extreme remoteness from the imperial center. As for Americans, they saw substantial benefits in the purchase, such as a great

enlargement of the national territory, acquisition of abundant natural resources, as well as facilitation of American trade in Asia.

However, both governments also had geopolitical considerations resulting from their troubled relationships with “the superpower of the 19th century”, the British Empire. In the 1860s Britain was the main adversary for both Russia and the United States. Russia had very fresh memories of a humiliating defeat at the hands of the British-led alliance in the Crimean War. In 1863 London vigorously supported the Polish uprising, threatening St. Petersburg with a new war. Meanwhile the Great Game between the Russian and British Empires was getting more intense in Central Asia. At the same time, Britain took the side of the South in the American Civil War. In those circumstances, the strategic alignment between Moscow and Washington looked predetermined. The Russian government gave the United States moral and diplomatic backing during the Civil War. It even dispatched two naval squadrons to New York and San Francisco in a show of support in September 1863.²

During the Civil War and immediately after it, Russian - American relations were very warm, perhaps the best ever in their history. The anti-British quasi-alliance of Washington and Petersburg created favorable conditions for the sale of Alaska. Many among the American ruling elite liked the idea of using Alaska in the pincer strategy to annex British Columbia (the western part of a future Canada, which was then Britain’s colonial possession). Americans were also worried that if they did not acquire Alaska, then the British might get it sooner or later.³

The Tsar government, making the decision to sell its North American possessions, was also greatly influenced by anti-British motives. “If the United States takes hold of our possessions,” the Russian envoy in Washington wrote, “the British Oregon will find itself sandwiched by the Americans both from north and south and will hardly avoid their attacks.”⁴ Therefore the Alaska deal was viewed by the Russian leaders as “a sort of a geopolitical maneuver aimed against Britain. They simultaneously tried to please the Americans, consolidating mutual friendship, and intimidate the British by threatening their colonial possessions in North America.”⁵

Episode 2. America and the Russo-Japanese War

In the 1890s America stepped up its Pacific policy, which was turning explicitly more imperialistic. In 1893, The Hawaiian Islands were annexed. In 1898, as a result of the war with Spain, the United States seized the Philippines. Leading American politicians and public figures, among them the navalist Alfred Mahan and the future president Theodore Roosevelt, spoke about East Asia's growing importance in the world balance of power.

Almost at the same time, the Pacific direction was assuming the utmost importance in Russia's imperial policies. The Tsarist government was dreaming of domination in Northeast Asia, particularly in Manchuria and Korea. The contradictions between Russian and American interests in the region were becoming more apparent.⁶

In 1899 the US Secretary of State John Hay announced "the open doors" doctrine that was aimed at preventing the dismemberment of China by great powers and securing America's unimpeded access to the Chinese market. Britain, Germany, France, Japan, and Italy responded positively to the Hay note. However, Russia replied equivocally, because Russian goods in Manchuria were less competitive and were more in need of tariff protection.⁷ This further exacerbated Russian and American differences in Northeast Asia.

Increasingly assertive and recalcitrant Russian behavior in the region led to the formation of a coalition by Japan, Britain, and the US. Whereas the alliance between London and Tokyo was sealed by a formal treaty in 1902, Washington's participation in this anti-Russian grouping was informal. In 1901 the Japanese approached the United States with suggestion of a joint military action against Russia. The Americans responded with a flat refusal: the US was not prepared to use force to achieve its goals in Asia.⁸ At the same time the Americans made it very clear who they were going to support politically in an impending conflict between Petersburg and Tokyo. When, in February 1904, Japan broke off relations with Russia, President Roosevelt said publicly that he would "maintain the strictest neutrality," but privately he wrote, "the sympathies of the United States are entirely on Japan's side."⁹

On the eve of the war and during its course, the US, along with Britain, provided Japan with substantial financial aid. American bankers helped Japan sell in the US four bond issues totaling almost 350 million dollars, or nearly half the cost of the entire war for Tokyo.¹⁰ Moreover, President Roosevelt warned Germany and France that if they provided military assistance to Russia, the United States would join forces with Japan against them.¹¹

The anti-Russian position of the American public was not based exclusively on geopolitical considerations. It was also important that Russia was seen in a very negative light as a backward, aggressive, and reactionary country. This was the opinion of Theodore Roosevelt himself. “No human beings, black, yellow or white, could be quite as untruthful, as insincere, as arrogant — in short, as untrustworthy in every way — as the Russians,” he wrote in August 1905, near the end of the Russo-Japanese War. The Japanese, on the other hand, were “a wonderful and civilized people,” Roosevelt wrote, “entitled to stand on an absolute equality with all the other peoples of the civilized world.”¹² George Kennan, Sr. was one of those who contributed a great deal to the making of Russia’s bad image. At the turn of the century Kennan was the most prominent Russia expert in America. He believed that Russia was a country of poverty, lawlessness, and tyranny.¹³ Finally, the anti-Russian shift of US foreign policy was greatly affected by the anti-Jewish pogroms that swept across Russia and were often condoned by the authorities. So it is hardly surprising that the Jewish-American banker Jacob Schiff played a key role in financing the Japanese war effort.¹⁴

The unexpectedly swift and shattering military defeat of Russia forced Washington to revise its stance. The main goal, removal of the threat of Russian hegemony in Northeast Asia, was achieved. However, Japan’s further strengthening was potentially dangerous. According to historian Warren Cohen, Roosevelt’s “initial delight over Japan’s military success in 1904, his contention that Japan was serving America’s ends, had given way to recognition that Japan might prove to be an even more formidable opponent of American interests in East Asia than Russia.”¹⁵

Therefore Roosevelt decided to broker a peace, which would establish a regional balance of power favorable to US interests. In September 1905, the US mediated the signing of the Treaty of

Portsmouth. This time the Americans showed much more understanding of Russia's interests. When Russian chief negotiator Count Sergei Vitte flatly refused to discuss the issue of indemnities demanded by the Japanese, Roosevelt backed Russia. He warned the Japanese that if they kept insisting on the indemnities and the war resumed, the US would change their attitude toward the warring sides. The Japanese had to back down.¹⁶

Episode 3. Moscow and Washington versus Tokyo

It was soon very apparent that American fears about a more powerful Japan were not unfounded. The Japanese Empire was clearly seeking hegemony in Asia and the Pacific. World War I barely finished when US - Japan disagreements became one of the driving forces of Asia-Pacific politics.

Meanwhile the Russian Empire collapsed in 1917. With the giant country breaking chaotically apart, a vacuum of power emerged in Eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East. In February 1918, Japan, acting formally under the Entente Mandate, landed its troops in Vladivostok and deployed military units to Northern Manchuria. A little later American, British, and French contingents arrived in the Russian Far East. The deployment of US troops was, to a great extent, intended to prevent Japan from monopolizing control over Russia's eastern territories.¹⁷ These concerns were valid. The size of the Japanese contingent quickly exceeded the limit sanctioned by the Entente¹⁸ and the Japanese indicated no sign of leaving the Far East even after World War I was over. Japan harbored plans to create a dependent Russian administration in the Far Eastern and Eastern Siberian area stretching as far west as the Lake Baikal. This was to be followed by their de facto separation from Russia and inclusion in the Japanese sphere of influence.

The Japanese aspirations were unacceptable not only for the Russians but also for the Americans, who were aware that Japan's control of the Russian Far East and Eastern Siberia would significantly increase its geopolitical might. In May 1921 the US government issued a note stating that, "the United States can not accept the violation by Japan of Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The United States hopes that Japan will be able in the nearest future to end its Siberian expedition and return Sakhalin to the Russian people."¹⁹

In such circumstances there arose a natural opportunity for Soviet Russia and the United States to find common ground. In March 1920, the Far Eastern republic was proclaimed, which included the area east of Baikal²⁰. The republic was created by Moscow to act as a buffer between Bolshevik Russia and Japan. Besides, the Bolsheviks hoped that the new quasi-state would be able to serve as a legal communication channel with Washington in order to collaborate against Japan. The US administration refused to deal with the Bolshevik authorities but could take a more favorable view of the Far Eastern republic, which, albeit under Moscow's control, was not openly communist.

Those expectations were realized, to some extent. Although the Far Eastern republic was never officially recognized by the United States, its representatives were allowed to visit Washington, when the international conference on Pacific affairs was held there from November 1921 to February 1922. Acting in an unofficial capacity, the Far Eastern republic delegation met with the Secretary of State Charles Hughes and conducted a successful propaganda campaign in the United States, exposing the expansionist intentions of the Japanese toward the Russian Far East. The delegation also tried to tempt the Americans with opportunities for profitable business deals and natural resources concessions. Holding out alluring prospects to American businessmen, the Russian representatives hoped that the business circles would pressure the US government to get more active in squeezing Japan out of the Russian Far East²¹.

“The Russian question” was discussed at the Washington conference in January 1922. Tokyo found itself in isolation. Under US pressure, which was supported by the other powers, Japan had to agree to withdraw its forces from the Russian territory (Primorye and Northern Sakhalin). By November 1922 all the Japanese troops left Russia's mainland.²² The American geopolitical interests helped Russia to retain its Far Eastern territories. Russia, even though under the Bolshevik rule, was needed by Washington as a counterweight to Japan and its Pacific expansionism.²³

The anti-Japanese partnership of Moscow and Washington continued into the 1930s. Diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union by the United States in November 1933 was, to a large extent, influenced by the necessity of joint counteraction to the expanding Japanese aggression in China.

According to the Russian-American researcher Eduard Lozanskiy, “Roosevelt was keen on establishing ties with a country that shared with the United States an acute feeling of danger posed by Japan. In the mid- and late 1930s, Washington was mainly interested in Moscow as a factor in the Pacific balance of power.”²⁴ It is noteworthy that at that time many in Washington held a view that, “the Eastern European area is the least important region in the world from the perspective of US interests.”²⁵ The anti-Japanese alignment of Moscow and Washington, which began in the 1920s, culminated with the USSR entering the Pacific War in August 1945.

Episode 4. The US and the Southern Kuriles problem

The end of World War II dramatically transformed the global geopolitical configuration. Having become superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union literally overnight switched from alliance to confrontation. Northeast Asia became the second most important regional theater of the Cold War, after Europe. To be sure, during the Cold War there were quite a few cases when Soviet and American interests clashed in Asia-Pacific. However, one of the most interesting, and relatively less known episodes has to do with the US role in the emergence of the Southern Kuriles/ Northern Territories dispute.

As is well known, Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill, meeting at Yalta in February 1945, agreed that the USSR would join the war against Japan. In return for Soviet military help, Washington and London agreed to hand over Southern Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands to Moscow. This agreement was realized in August and September 1945, when the Soviet Union helped deal a final fatal blow to the Japanese Empire. The Soviet forces occupied the southern half of Sakhalin and the entire Kurile Islands chain, including the islands of Shikotan and Habomai. At that time, the fact of the Soviet occupation of the islands drew no protests from the Americans. The only thing the United States was flatly opposed to was Stalin’s idea to send Soviet troops into the northern part of Hokkaido, one of Japan’s four main islands. The Kuriles were not of any interest to the Americans then.

However, as the Cold War grew more intense, the US position on the Kuriles began to change. As early as late 1945 Washington used the Kurile issue as a bargaining chip to pressure Moscow into

acceptance of transfer of the Micronesia islands to the control of the US.²⁶ According to a Japanese researcher Miwa Kimitada, “we cannot ignore that a cause-and-effect relationship existed in the Northern Territories issue, which was a child of American foreign policy aimed at establishing her hegemonic status in the postwar Asian-Pacific region in concord with the Soviet Union. They (the Northern Territories) were exchanged for the United States’ military preponderance over Micronesia.”²⁷

In the San Francisco Peace Treaty, concluded in September 1951, Japan renounced “all right, title and claim to the Kurile Islands”. However, the text of the treaty did not specify to whom exactly the jurisdiction over the Kuriles was transferred. Moreover, the treaty did not specify which territories were included in “the Kurile Islands”. The Soviet Union sent a delegation to San Francisco, but refused to sign the treaty, mainly because the People’s Republic of China was not invited to the conference.

The treaty was largely drafted by the United States. The vagueness of some of the document’s clauses might have been designed as a trap, conceived by John Foster Dulles, the main architect of the San Francisco settlement, in order to provoke disputes between Japan and its neighbors, thus making Japan more dependent on America in security matters.²⁸ As Kimie Hara points out, “the equivocal wording of the Peace Treaty was neither coincidence nor error; it followed careful deliberation and multiple revisions, and deliberately left various issues unresolved due to the regional Cold War...In this way, the treaty sowed the seeds of future disputes.”²⁹

The final and the most dramatic act of American interference with the Kuriles problem took place in 1956. At that time the USSR and Japan were in negotiations on the normalization of bilateral relations and a peace treaty. During the negotiations Moscow and Tokyo came very close to the settlement of the territorial issue. The Soviet Union was prepared to return Shikotan and the Habomai islets in exchange for the peace treaty. The Japanese leadership was also contemplating such a compromise. Yet the US State Secretary Dulles, during a meeting with Japanese Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu in London in August 1956, made it clear that Washington was opposed to a compromise solution. Dulles reminded Shigemitsu that the Kuriles and Ryukus were handled in the same manner, but the US had stipulated that if Japan conceded to Russia, the US could demand similar terms. If Japan agreed that the

Soviet Union was entitled to sovereignty over the Kuriles, the US would assume it was entitled to sovereignty over Okinawa.³⁰

As the Australian researcher Gregory Clark points out, “the U.S., which in 1951 had forced Japan to renounce all claim to the Kuriles, including Etorofu and Kunashiri, in 1956 was able to threaten to turn Okinawa into a U.S. colony if Japan did not maintain all claim to the Kurils, including Etorofu and Kunashiri. Machiavelli would have been proud of that.”³¹ “The Dulles warning” virtually killed a very possible Soviet - Japanese territorial settlement. To this very day the territorial problem remains the only major obstacle to Russia - Japan relations.³²

After the Cold War: neither opponents, nor partners

The collapse of the Soviet Union radically transformed Moscow’s foreign policy on all fronts, including the Pacific. The United States, as well as Japan, and South Korea, which had been previously seen as the main adversaries in Northeast Asia, began to be treated as valued partners. By contrast, the ties to the former ally, North Korea, were reduced to almost zero. Moscow’s military strategy in the Pacific changed too. While in the 1970s and 1980s the clout of the Soviet Pacific Fleet was rapidly building up, alarming Americans and their allies, in the 1990s the Russian naval presence in the Pacific virtually ceased to exist. Due to drastic cuts in funding, Russia’s ground and naval forces in the Pacific experienced considerable degradation. Having lost its military-strategic leverage, Russia at the same time was unable to integrate into the Asia-Pacific regional economic system. The economy of the Russian Far East descended into deep crisis, being relegated to the role of a natural resource appendage for neighboring countries. In fact, in the 1990s Russia ceased to be a major actor in the Asia-Pacific.

Those circumstances shaped the character of Pacific relations between the United States and Russia in the post-Cold War period. Washington no longer perceived Moscow as posing any threat to its interests in the region. Yet this did not result in any substantial increase in political and economic cooperation between Russia and America. Politically, Moscow was too weak in the Pacific for Washington to have any significant interest in establishing meaningful bilateral collaboration. On the economic front, following a brief period of high expectations, the American business world became

disillusioned with the Russian Far East. The local market was too small and could not generate substantial profits, whereas the risks related to rampant crime and corruption were too high. The only exception was the Sakhalin oil and gas projects, with *Exxon* as a major investor.

The US attitude toward Russia in the Pacific in the 1990s can be characterized as “benevolent indifference”. Washington did not obstruct Moscow’s attempts at integration into the Asia-Pacific, but did little to help them. One of the few exceptions was diplomatic support that the United States extended to Russia when it was applying for APEC membership in 1997. Then several APEC member-states opposed Russia joining the organization, citing the insignificance of Russian participation in the regional economy. The United States, along with Japan and China, backed Moscow’s application, deciding the matter. However, some saw this as the US desire to compensate Russia for the NATO eastward enlargement, which was happening at the time. As the former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating remarked, “Russia’s membership was supported by the United States in part, I believe, to atone for another bad decision - to expand NATO to the borders of the old Soviet Union. This sent a signal to Russia that it wasn’t wanted as part of the European system. Instead it was offered APEC membership as a consolation prize in the Asia Pacific.”³³

Moscow and Washington versus Beijing?

In the 2000s, during Putin’s and Medvedev’s tenures, Russia somewhat restored its position in the Asia-Pacific. In particular, this is reflected in the increased funding for Russia’s military in the Pacific. On the political and diplomatic front, Russia resuscitated the contacts with Pyongyang, while keeping good relations with Seoul. Most important, Moscow established a “strategic partnership” with China, both in bilateral and multilateral (the Shanghai Cooperation Organization) formats. In addition, the Russian government launched a massive program of state-funded investments in the social and economic development of its Far Eastern areas. The objective is not only to upgrade the economy and infrastructure but also to reinforce Russia’s geopolitical position in the Pacific. One of the signs of Russia’s return to Northeast Asia has been its participation in the Six-Party talks on North Korea.³⁴

It is remarkable that of all the areas, where Moscow’s and Washington’s geopolitical interests

overlap, it is the Asia-Pacific where their interests are least conflicting and most compatible. Whereas in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia Russia and America are competitors rather than partners, they do not have irreconcilable disagreements in the Pacific. This is quite easy to explain.

Moscow makes it clear that it still considers the post-Soviet space as the area of Russia's "privileged interests". Furthermore, Russia still wields effective political, economic, and military leverage over its Eastern European, Caucasian and Central Asian neighbors, many of whom are weak and vulnerable states. Meanwhile, the United States is keen on counteracting the spread of Russian influence in the post-Soviet space, and all the more so in larger Europe. The clash of Moscow's and Washington's geopolitical interests in volatile regions west and south of Russia is quite a natural occurrence from the *realpolitik* standpoint.

In Northeast Asia the situation is quite different. Although Moscow's influence has grown in recent years, it is still too weak to be perceived by Washington as an actual, or even potential, threat. Russia's central geopolitical interest in the region is to retain effective control over its Pacific territories, not to expand at the expense of others. It is well understood in Washington, as well as in other Northeast Asian capitals.

In a similar way, Russia does not see any major threat in the American presence in the Pacific, if only because Moscow claims no "privileged interests" in Northeast Asia that could be encroached upon by Washington. From time to time Russian diplomats criticize Washington's "bloc approach" to the regional security. From Moscow's viewpoint, "bilateral military alliances, purporting to be the foundation of the region's security, can not serve as an alternative to full-fledged mechanisms for security and cooperation...any arrangements based on the attempt to treat some Asia-Pacific states as "the first rank" countries and others as the "second rank" ones... are essentially flawed."³⁵ However, such criticisms are fairly mild and muted, and can not be compared with the fierceness with which Moscow reacts to the NATO enlargement plans on its European borders.

Russia also disapproves of the US - Japan missile defense being built in Northeast Asia. "We are against the missile defense systems aimed at gaining military superiority", Russian Foreign

Minister Sergei Lavrov emphasized, "...the deployment of such systems may spur the arms race both on regional and global scale."³⁶ Yet it is telling that Russia chose not to make the Asian missile defense a priority issue in its bilateral relations with the United States as it did when the Bush administration intended to install missile defense weapons in Poland and Czech Republic. So far Russia does not see the American-led Asian missile defense as a direct threat to its strategic deterrent, understanding that the missile shield is primarily designed against North Korea and China.

One of the issues in Northeast Asia on which Russia and the United States currently have different positions is North Korea. Washington takes a hard line on Pyongyang and wants "regime change". Moscow seeks the continuation of status-quo on the peninsula and preservation of the DPRK as an independent player. However, these differences could be overcome. It is quite likely that Moscow will eventually conclude that the continuation of the North Korean regime benefits China much more than Russia. This might lead it into acceptance of a swift Korean reunification, even if that should be carried out as the absorption of the DPRK by the pro-American South Korea.

One question that could become a potentially serious bone of contention between Russia and the United States concerns the Arctic spaces adjacent to the North Pacific. Moscow is worried that Washington might try to put together an anti-Russian Arctic coalition. Presently it is the US position on the Arctic issues that is the most divergent from Russia's position. Some of these disputes are about differing approaches to the jurisdiction over the continental shelf. More important disagreements concern the legal status of the Arctic sea-lanes, including the Russia-controlled Northern Sea Route (*Северный морской путь*). The United States seeks internationalization of those Arctic sea-lanes. Yet the confrontation could be avoided if this problem is dealt with in a rational and constructive way, based on mutual concessions. Such a compromise solution is quite achievable. A good case in point is the recent agreement between Russia and Norway on the disputed areas in the Barents Sea.

Although both America and Russia are important players in Northeast Asia, they are, in a sense, alien to this region. The geographic, cultural and economic core of Northeast Asia is constituted by China, Japan and Korea that have been stepping up trilateral cooperation over recent years. Both Russia

and the United States may face the risk of being marginalized if the Northeast Asian integration evolves toward an exclusive “Asian club”. This shared concern might spur Moscow and Washington to enhance their collaboration in the Asia-Pacific.

However, it is the “China factor” that might serve as the most powerful prod for the Russia – US “Pacific entente”. It seems likely that Sino – American tensions in the Asia-Pacific will grow ever more intense. Beijing seeks its own East Asian sphere of influence in the spirit of the Monroe doctrine. However, Washington is determined to oppose Chinese aspirations in order to retain its strategic primacy in the Asia-Pacific. There are indications that the United States is constructing an (as yet) informal coalition to contain China. America’s efforts to expand and strengthen this coalition will grow more vigorous as its competition with China becomes more acute. At some point, Washington might decide that Russia, too, must be part of balancing against China, leading to a proposal by America to Russia about the establishment of strategic collaboration. Whether Moscow accepts this proposal would depend primarily on the character of its relations with Beijing. If China is seen as a growing threat, then Moscow would be inclined to come into some sort of alignment with Washington.

In addition, a great deal will be determined by the state of Russian - American relations in other areas, which are deemed vital by Moscow, particularly Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. If Russia and the United States find themselves locked into confrontation over these regions, then even “the China threat” would hardly be able to move Moscow toward effective alignment with Washington.

To be sure, the considerations of a possible Russia – US alliance on the anti-China basis are so far mostly hypothetical. Yet such options are already being discussed by some Russian experts who are close to the Kremlin. For instance, a well-known political analyst Andranik Migranyan published an article in the official *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* in which he mentions that Russia and the United States could become “constructive partners... in a number of regions,” as well as in “the containment of China.”³⁷ Washington also signals its willingness to enhance cooperation with Russia on the Asia-Pacific affairs. In particular, the latest edition of the National Military Strategy maintains that America welcomes Russia “playing a more active role in preserving security and stability in Asia.”³⁸

Conclusion: Going beyond Geopolitical Logic

Russia - US political interaction in the Pacific has always been defined by the balance of power logic. Moscow and Washington only cooperated when they faced a common threat. In the 1860s it was the British Empire that was seen as such a threat, while from the 1920s through 1940s it was Japan. Today another geopolitical entente of Russia and America might be in the offing, motivated by the rise of China. Whether this prospective alliance happens or not will depend on many variables, primarily on how threatening, if at all, Beijing's behavior is perceived in Washington and Moscow.

Furthermore, the past historical analogies should be used with caution. In the 19th century, and until the 1940s, the United States had next to no interest in what was going on in the regions of major importance to Russia, such as Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Nowadays these areas are America's "vital interests", often leading to bitter rivalry between Moscow and Washington. If Russia and the United States are to establish durable partnership in the Asia-Pacific, they will need to resolve, or at least moderate, their disagreements in other areas where their interests come in touch, especially in the post-Soviet space.

But even if Russian – American alliance on the basis of China containment comes into being, it will essentially be a forced partnership since it is only sustained by the existence of a common threat. In order to move from the interaction based on the primitive balance of power thinking to positive and genuine cooperation, the entire content of Russian – American relations has to be transformed. This means that Russia and the United States need to become major economic partners for each other. Furthermore, sharing basic political values is extremely important.

In 2010, the Russia – US trade amounted to 23.6 billion dollars, accounting for just 3.8 percent of Russia's total foreign trade (for comparison: Russia's trade with Turkey is over 25 bln dollars).³⁹ As of 2008, Russia was America's 23rd largest goods trading partner.⁴⁰ It seems paradoxical that Russia's Pacific territories, despite their proximity to America, have miniscule amount of trade with the United States. In 2010, the volume of the Russian Far East's trade with the United States totaled just 568

million dollars (2.4 percent of the Russian Far East's foreign trade).⁴¹ There is no single direct air flight connecting the Russian Pacific territories with the United States.

Finding common political values is going to be even more difficult than it will be to increase the volume of trade and investment. In Washington's rankings of democracy Russia has long been designated as a "not free" country, along with North Korea, Turkmenistan and Saudi Arabia.⁴² Yet it is not only Russia that should improve its performance on democracy. Perhaps the United States must do something too, in particular stop thinking of itself as the single and highest standard of democracy and human rights. This needs to be a two-way street. And if it is, Russia and the United States might get a chance to break out of archaic geopolitics, creating a positive and substantive partnership both in the Pacific and in their overall relationship.

¹ Л.Н. Гарусова. *Россия и США: Тихоокеанское взаимодействие на рубеже веков (1991 – 2003 гг.)*. Владивосток: Изд-во ВГУЭС, 2005, с. 3.

² *История дипломатии*. М.: АСТ, 2006. С. 512-513.

³ Илья Виньковецкий. *Начало и конец заморского колониализма Российской империи на северном Тихом океане: роль Великобритании*. Конференция «Русская цивилизация в северной Пасифике», 21-22 мая 2009 г., Владивосток, Дальневосточный государственный университет.

³ Виньковецкий. Ук. соч., с. 6-7.

⁴ Н. Болховитинов. *Русско-американские отношения и продажа Аляски, 1834-1867*. М.: Наука, 1990, с. 114.

⁵ Виньковецкий. Ук. соч., с. 9-10.

⁶ At the same time, America's relations with its erstwhile worst enemy, England, were getting much more cordial, especially after London de facto recognized South America as belonging to the US sphere of influence.

⁷ *История дипломатии*. Ук. соч., с. 702.

⁸ Warren I. Cohen. *East Asia at the Center*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 300.

⁹ James Bradley. *Diplomacy That Will Live in Infamy*. The New York Times. Dec. 6, 2009.

¹⁰ Walter LaFeber. *The Clash: US-Japan Relations throughout History*. N.Y.: W.W. Norton, 1997, p.81.

¹¹ *История дипломатии*. Ук. соч., с. 732.

¹² Bradley. Op. cit.

¹³ Eugene P. Trani and Donald E. Davis. *Roosevelt and the U.S. Role: Perception Makes Policy*. In: Treaty of Portsmouth and its Legacies / Steven Ericson and Allen Hockley (eds.). Dartmouth: Dartmouth College Press, 2008.

¹⁴ Kent Calder and Min Ye. *The Making of Northeast Asia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010. P. 229-230.

¹⁵ Cohen. Op. cit., p. 301.

¹⁶ *История дипломатии*. Ук. соч., с. 732-733.

¹⁷ *Системная история международных отношений. Том I. События 1918 – 1945*. Под ред. А.Д. Богатурова. М.: Московский рабочий, 2000, с. 138-139.

¹⁸ American, British and French contingents in the Russian Far East had around 7,000 troops each, whereas the number of the Japanese forces fluctuated between 55,000 and 120,000. (*Системная история международных отношений*. Ук. соч., с. 139).

¹⁹ *Системная история международных отношений*. Ук. соч., с. 140.

²⁰ The capital of the republic was Chita in Eastern Siberia.

²¹ Е. Фролова. *Деятельность русских представителей в период работы Вашингтонской конференции (1921 – 1922 гг.)*. Проблемы Дальнего Востока. 2009. №2. С. 129.

²² Japanese occupation of Northern Sakhalin lasted till 1925, ending only after the establishment of Soviet – Japanese diplomatic relations.

²³ Фролова. Ук. соч. С. 124.

²⁴ Э. Лозанский. *Россия между Америкой и Китаем*. М.: Международные отношения, 2007, с. 224.

²⁵ Лозанский. Ук. Соч, с. 224.

²⁶ US Secretary of State James Byrnes met with his Soviet counterpart Vyacheslav Molotov in December 1945. Byrnes proposed that the Micronesia islands that had been under Japanese rule be placed under a US trusteeship. When Molotov refused, Byrnes suggested that the Kuriles and the southern part of Sakhalin be placed under a UN trusteeship, with their ultimate fate to be determined by an international conference. Molotov was shocked and later, in a UN Security Council vote in 1947, supported the US proposal, in return for which the US acquiesced in the Soviet control of the Kuriles and southern Sakhalin (Miwa Kimitada. <http://www.info.sophia.ac.jp/amecana/Journal/6-1.htm>. This article was originally published in Japanese, in *Chuokoron*, October 1990).

²⁷ Kimitada. Op. cit.

²⁸ Nobuo Shimotomai. *The Cold War in East Asia and the Northern Territories problem*. In: Northern Territories, Asia-Pacific Regional Conflicts and the Aland Experience. Ed. by Kimie Hara and Geoffrey Jukes. New York: Routledge, 2009. P. 54-55.

²⁹ Kimie Hara. "Introduction". In Kimie Hara and Geoffrey Jukes, eds. *Northern Territories, Asia-Pacific Regional Conflicts and the Aland Experience*. New York: Routledge, 2009. P. 2-3.

³⁰ Richard Halloran. "US Views on the Northern Territories Issue". In Kimie Hara and Geoffrey Jukes, eds. *Northern Territories, Asia-Pacific Regional Conflicts and the Aland Experience*. New York: Routledge, 2009. P. 91.

³¹ Gregory Clark. *Northern Territories dispute highlights flawed diplomacy*. <http://www.gregoryclark.net/jt/page34/page34.html> (Originally published in The Japan Times, March 24, 2005).

³² It is telling that after the Cold War the United States lost any interest in the Kuriles issue. Washington's official line is that "the United States recognizes Japanese sovereignty over the islands" (US Department of State, October 6, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/4142.htm>). However, as the American researcher Richard Halloran points out, Washington seems "prepared to do no more than give rhetorical support to Tokyo's claims to the islands" (Halloran, op. cit., p. 84). According to American diplomats, any solution that was agreed upon by the Japanese and Russians would be acceptable to the US so long as it was reached peaceably (Ibid.).

³³ *Speech by P. J. Keating to 1998 Pacific Rim Forum. APEC's Sixth Leaders' Summit Meeting: Implications for the Strategic Architecture of the Asian Hemisphere*. Shanghai, 22 September 1998. Australian APEC Study Centre Issues Paper 14. <http://www.apec.org.au/docs/iss14.htm>

³⁴ In the 1990s, Russia was largely isolated from the major discussions on the Korean Peninsula issues.

³⁵ *Выступление заместителя Министра иностранных дел России А.Н. Бородавкина на конференции на тему «Азиатско-Тихоокеанский регион: сообщество XXI века»*, Сидней, 4 декабря 2009 года. www.mid.ru

³⁶ С. Лавров. *Россия против американо-японской системы ПРО*. 17.10.2007. <http://top.rbc.ru/politics/17/10/2007/122727.shtml?print>

³⁷ Андраник Мигранян. *Взрывы назревали изнутри*. Российская газета. 11 марта 2011 г.

³⁸ *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington, D.C.: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. February 2011. P. 13

³⁹ *Внешняя торговля Российской Федерации по основным странам за январь-декабрь 2010 г.* Федеральная таможенная служба РФ. <http://www.customs.ru/ru/stats/arhiv-stats-new/popup.php?id286=753>

⁴⁰ <http://www.ustr.gov/countries-regions/europe-middle-east/russia-and-eurasia/russia> (accessed May 7, 2011).

⁴¹ *Информация о товарообороте субъектов Российской Федерации, расположенных на территории ДФО по странам и о товарной структуре экспорта и импорта субъектов РФ ДФО через таможенные ДВТУ за январь-декабрь 2009-2010 гг.* Дальневосточное таможенное управление. http://dvtu.customs.ru/common/img/uploaded/files/dvtu/dv_dinamika_2010.xls

⁴² *Freedom in the World 2011: The Authoritarian Challenge to Democracy*. Freedom House, www.freedomhouse.org