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# ASIAN ORGANIZATIONS<sup>1</sup>

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## **Russia and Asia-Pacific institutions: declining engagement**

Despite having two-thirds of its territory in Asia, Russia is a latecomer to Asian regional institutions. Due to the Cold War, the Soviet Union was shut out of regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific that was dominated by the United States and its friends, having instead to rely on bilateral ties with a few Communist allies and quasi-allies such as Vietnam, Mongolia and North Korea. Moscow's only multilateral initiative at that time was the 1969 "Asian collective security" proposal.

The situation began to change under Mikhail Gorbachev, who, in his July 1986 speech in Vladivostok, announced Moscow's intention to shift emphasis from military buildup to diplomatic and economic engagement with the Asia-Pacific countries. In 1988, the Soviet government set up the national committee for Pacific economic cooperation and in the same year the Soviet delegation attended a meeting of the quasi-official Pacific Economic Cooperation Conference, the most prominent Asia-Pacific multilateral body at that time (Sneider, 1988).

Following the end of the bipolar confrontation, Russia joined the region's premier non-governmental forums, Pacific Economic Cooperation Council and Pacific Basin Economic Council, in 1992 and 1994 respectively. Yet acquiring the membership in the intergovernmental Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), which in the 1990s was widely seen as the main vehicle for region-wide integration, proved more difficult. For one thing, in the 1990s Russia's share of Asia-Pacific total exports stood at a meager 0.4 percent. This did not quite square with one of APEC's membership requirements that an applicant country have substantial economic ties to the Asia-Pacific. Another hurdle to Russia's membership was the apprehensions of some of the smaller and middle-sized APEC economies, such as Australia, that the addition of another big country would weaken their positions and raise the risks of great power domination within the forum. However, at the 1997 Vancouver summit Russia's APEC application was finally approved, along with Peru's and Vietnam's. Moscow's bid was supported by the United States, China and Japan, thus deciding the matter. In 1994 Russia became a founding member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and in 1996 it was granted the status of a dialogue partner of ASEAN.<sup>2</sup>

Despite joining APEC and ARF, Russia, due to domestic turmoil, ceased to be a major factor in the Asia-Pacific during the 1990s. However, since 2000 Russia has managed to substantially improve its internal situation, enabling Moscow to embark on more pro-active policies in Asia,

both on the level of bilateral relations and in multilateral settings. In 2003, Russia became one of the co-sponsors of the Six-Party Talks (SPT) on the North Korean nuclear issue. In 2007, Russia became the chair of one of the five working groups created within the SPT framework – the group on Northeast Asia peace and security mechanism – further raising Moscow’s enthusiasm about SPT. In 2005, Russia sought membership of the East Asia Summit at its inaugural meeting in Kuala Lumpur, where President Vladimir Putin attended as a special guest. At that moment, the bid failed to gain consensus approval. Yet, in 2010, Russia, along with the United States, finally secured an invitation to join EAS (effective since 2011). In 2010 Russia joined the expanded ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM-Plus), a platform bringing together defense officials from ASEAN and its eight dialogue partners.<sup>3</sup> The same year Russia was admitted into the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM).

Thus, by 2011, Russia secured membership of all the Asia-Pacific principal multilateral political and security bodies – SPT, ARF, ADMM-Plus, EAS and ASEM. Russia viewed its involvement in the Asia-Pacific diplomatic forums as confirmation of its standing as a major Asia-Pacific power.

While Russia attained full representation in the Asia-Pacific political institutions, in the economic arena its presence could be characterized as very modest at best. Russia was one of the very few economies in the Asia-Pacific that had no free trade agreements in the region.<sup>4</sup> APEC remained the only regional economic institution in which Russia had membership. That was one of the motivations for Moscow to invest considerable efforts and resources in hosting APEC events in 2012 when Russia acted as the forum’s chair. The APEC summit in Vladivostok, held in September 2012, was a relative success (Martin, 2012). One of the major deliverables of the Vladivostok APEC Leaders’ Meeting was an environmental goods and services agreement that called for the tariffs on 54 products, like solar panels, to be reduced to 5 percent or less. In hindsight, the APEC summit in Vladivostok was the high point of Russia’s involvement in East Asia/Pacific multilateralism.

After 2012, Russia’s interest in East Asian/Pacific multilateral economic institutions started to wane (Gabuev, 2014). Even in APEC, instead of following up on the achievements of the 2012 chairmanship, Russian officials and business leaders significantly scaled down their activities. This was as the result of several confluent developments.

First, in the realm of economic integration, Moscow decided to concentrate efforts on the promotion of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), a Russia-centered single market encompassing several former Soviet republics.<sup>5</sup> As Kirill Muradov points out, “having prioritised its own economic bloc within former Soviet borders, Russia drew a dividing line between itself and the emerging Pacific mega-regionals or even individual state members” (Muradov, 2013).

Second, by late 2012, it became obvious that APEC would not be the platform for Asia-Pacific trade liberalization and remain at best an OECD-type regional organization for functional cooperation in some niche areas. Instead, two competing integration projects emerged – the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) championed by ASEAN and China. Russia was ready to join neither of them: most of its manufacturing industries were (and still are) too uncompetitive to seriously contemplate entering a region-wide FTA with Asia-Pacific economies. Even a “low-quality” FTA, such as RCEP, would be extremely problematic for many sectors of Russia’s economy.

Third, a drastic deterioration in Russia’s relations with the United States over Ukraine had an inevitable impact on their interaction in the Asia-Pacific. Whereas prior to the Ukraine crisis, Russian-US strategic dialogue and collaboration in the Pacific seemed possible (Japan-Russia-US Trilateral Conference, 2012), after the crisis it was out of the question. With the United States imposing sanctions on Russia, and its Pacific allies – Japan and Australia – following suit, Russia obviously could not hope for their support in the Asia-Pacific multilateral bodies.<sup>6</sup>

Having stalled on multilateral regionalism after 2012, Russia's only achievement in institutionalizing its economic links with the Asia-Pacific was the signing, in May 2015, of a bilateral FTA between the EEU and Vietnam, Russia's first in Asia. With a modest volume of bilateral trade and with many tariff lines exempted from liberalization, the FTA, which came into effect in October 2016, is mostly of symbolic and political value. The negotiations on another pilot FTA, with New Zealand, were frozen by Wellington in 2014 in response to Russia's actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.

As for political-security institutions in the Asia-Pacific, Russia has similarly shown a lackluster performance. SPT – the arrangement in which Moscow has a major interest and certain leverage due to the Korean Peninsula's proximity to Russian borders – has been stalled since 2009, mainly because of disagreements between Pyongyang and Washington. EAS, ARF and ADMM-Plus have continued to function, but Russia has mostly kept a low profile in these forums. One indication of Russia's unwillingness to invest much in East Asian institutionalism is Russian presidents' consistent failure to show up at the EAS annual meetings. Ever since Russia was admitted as a full member in 2011, no Russian leader has ever made it to the summit, which is seen as the region's premier security forum,<sup>7</sup> even while Moscow was paying lip service to EAS as the “key element in the construction of the new regional security architecture (Commentary of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). Similarly, ADMM-Plus has never been attended by a Russian minister of defense, who sends his deputies instead.

What are the reasons behind Russia's relative passivity within EAS, ARF and ADMM-Plus? For one, all of these bodies are ASEAN-centric and thus focused on Southeast Asia. Unlike Eastern Europe, Central Asia or the Middle East, this is a region remote from Russia, holding relatively little strategic importance for Moscow, and the one where Russia's leverage is limited. Second, EAS, ARF and ADMM-Plus remain toothless and feckless institutions. It is not them but rather the hub-and-spoke system of US alliances that underpins Asia-Pacific security and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. Moscow has little motivation to invest its diplomatic resources in institutions whose influence is rather symbolic. Finally, in the last few years the South China Sea sovereignty disputes have emerged as one of the top agenda items for the three forums. Without a direct stake in the South China Sea, Moscow is not interested in tackling this issue or in backing any one side in the dispute, especially given the fact that China and Vietnam – the principal antagonists in the South China Sea – are both Russia's strategic partners. If it supported one, it would risk damaging relations with the other. The wisest course of action, then, is to pursue diplomatic neutrality and eschew commitments to any side of the argument. Thus, the lowered level of representation might be the most appropriate.

Despite Moscow's repeated pronouncements about the importance of the relationship with ASEAN, it seems that from the very beginning Russia's involvement in ASEAN-centric political-security forums has been largely determined by prestige considerations – formalizing Russia's status as a great global power and a major Asian player – rather than by the desire to pro-actively shape international politics in Southeast Asia. The third Russia-ASEAN summit hosted by Putin at Sochi in May 2016 was mostly a ritualistic event with few substantive deliverables.<sup>8</sup>

As Russia's interest in Asia-Pacific multilateralism has declined, Moscow is now prioritizing a different set of institutions – the arrangements that are less “Pacific” and much more “Asian,” or “Eurasian,” centered on the Moscow-Beijing strategic axis.

### **Russo-Chinese “strategic partnership” as an institutionalized quasi-alliance**

China and Russia see their crucial national interests as mutually nonexclusive at the very least. As Dmitry Trenin observes, the Russia-China bond “is solid, for it is based on fundamental national interests regarding the world order as both the Russian and Chinese governments would prefer

to see it” (Trenin, 2013: 6). Moscow is not inimical to China’s rise as a great power, since this creates for Russia economic and political alternatives other than the West. For its part, China sees its security interests as generally compatible with those of Russia (Li, 2009). This convergence of basic interests constitutes the foundation for a strategic partnership. The existence of a common foe – the United States – may be transforming the partnership into an entente (Trenin, 2015). References to the Russian–Chinese relationship as a “de facto alliance” are increasingly being used by Russia’s leading foreign policy experts (see, for example, Karaganov, 2014). A joint report by Russian and Chinese scholars sees “elements of a military–political alliance,” albeit not legally binding, emerging between the two countries (Luzyanin et al., 2015a: 6). The report argues that, “if need be, the ties can be converted into an alliance relationship without long preparations” (Luzyanin et al., 2015a: 8).

Characterized by converging strategic interests, shared norms (especially the emphasis on the classic Westphalian sovereignty), extensive network of intergovernmental mechanisms and legal agreements, coordination of foreign, and increasingly economic, policies, the Sino-Russian relationship can be viewed as a bilateral institution of consequence for the global and Asian international order.

### **Moscow’s pursuit of Eurasian continentalism**

The Sino-Russian strategic partnership serves as the core for an emerging architecture of multilateral institutions in continental Eurasia.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Shanghai Cooperation Organization***

The SCO has been the most important institutional element of Eurasian continentalism. SCO was launched in 2001 and initially included six members – Russia, China, and four Central Asian republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan).<sup>10</sup> SCO can best be defined as a multilateral strategic partnership (Luzyanin et al., 2015b: 9), modeled in many respects on the Sino-Russian strategic partnership, and the one in which Beijing and Moscow play the role of co-leaders. SCO’s main areas of activities are regional security (with the emphasis on combating terrorism,<sup>11</sup> extremism, and drug trafficking), economic cooperation, and scientific and cultural exchanges.

So far SCO has mostly acted as a forum for consultation and coordination among Russia, China, and four Central Asian “stans.” It has implemented relatively few tangible multilateral projects. For example, SCO has yet to deliver on any substantial economic cooperation. However, SCO’s most significant contribution has been in maintaining security and stability in Central Asia. SCO has certainly made it easier for Moscow and Beijing to manage Central Asia in a constructive manner while avoiding direct competition and clashes of interest. SCO has been a stabilizing factor in an inherently unstable region made up of fragile states under the constant threat of the spread of militant Islamism from neighboring Afghanistan and the Middle East.

Alexander Lukin argues that, in addition to using SCO as an instrument of maintaining stability – in collaboration with China – in Central Asia, Moscow has seen it mostly as a political institution embodying Russia’s ideological preference for a multi-polar world order and as an alternative to Western-dominated institutions (Lukin, 2015). This vision is in agreement with China’s.<sup>12</sup> As a related and more specific objective, both Moscow and Beijing view SCO as a mechanism to limit what they see as the undesirable Western interference in Central Asia.<sup>13</sup>

Since 2001, SCO has developed to go well beyond Sino-Russian co-management of Central Asian security. One crucial indication of the organization’s growth is the expansion of its membership from the initial six to eight (with the entry, in June 2017, of India and Pakistan

as full members). SCO also has attracted four observer states (Iran, Afghanistan, Belarus, Mongolia) and six dialogue partners (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey, Sri Lanka). SCO's obvious appeal lies in its role as the only available institutional platform for multilateral interaction in Central Asia and the surrounding areas of continental Eurasia, especially on security issues.

### ***Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA)***

This hitherto obscure forum started in the 1990s as a vanity project of Kazakhstani President Nursultan Nazarbayev. At present CICA brings together 26 participants from different parts of Asia and the Middle East, including Russia, India, South Korea, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and Egypt. Of note, the United States and its most loyal Asia-Pacific allies – Japan and Australia – are not among CICA's members.

In 2014 China took over the CICA presidency from Turkey and hosted the 4th summit in Shanghai in May 2014. The event became the group's largest ever, gathering 12 heads of state and government and 10 chiefs of international organizations, including the presidents of Russia, Iran, and the United Nations Secretary-General. Beijing's promotion of CICA may be aimed at forming a multilateral security system that covers most countries in Asia, but excludes "external forces," above all the United States and its main ally, Japan (Mu Chunshan, 2014).

Russia has yet to clarify its strategy toward CICA. On the one hand, Russia is a founding member and has been supportive of CICA. On the other, CICA, compared to SCO, is clearly of secondary importance to Moscow.

### ***Russia-India-China (RIC) trilateral***

The idea of a tripartite grouping, consisting of Russia, China, and India, was first voiced by Russian prime minister Evgeny Primakov in 1998. His vision of a strategic axis of the three largest powers in Eurasia acting as an effective counterbalance to the US hegemony has never got off the ground due to Sino-Indian rivalry and Delhi's lack of enthusiasm in associating itself with something that looked like an anti-Western coalition. A more modest version of Primakov's proposal was realized in the form of regular trilateral meetings of foreign ministers, the first of which was convened in Russia's Vladivostok in 2005. The latest (as of February 2017) 14th annual meeting of the three countries' foreign ministers, held in Moscow in April 2016, reiterated their common vision for "a more just and democratic multi-polar international system" as well as rejecting "forced regime change from the outside in any country" and emphasizing the "core principles" of respect for state sovereignty and non-interference into internal affairs of other states. Such language is in clear opposition to the Western liberal hegemony ("Joint Communiqué of the 14th Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Russian Federation, the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China," 2016). Of course, RIC forms the core of the BRICS grouping – the world's most significant non-Western arrangement.

### ***Russia-Mongolia-China trilateral***

Another Eurasian trilateral that has been recently taking shape includes Moscow, Beijing, and Ulan Bator. To some extent, Mongolia is being incorporated into the Sino-Russian entente. This was evidenced by the near-simultaneous visits by Xi and Putin to Ulan Bator (the Chinese leader came on August 21–22, 2014; Putin visited on September 5), followed by the first trilateral summit among China, Mongolia, and Russia held in Dushanbe on September 11, 2014

on the sidelines of the SCO meeting. The three presidents enunciated the vision of a “China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor” (Campi, 2014). Annual trilateral summits were continued in 2015 and 2016, supported by the mechanism of regular meetings at vice-ministerial level. That said, Ulan Bator, politely deflecting Moscow’s advice, is still in no hurry to join SCO as a full member and sticks with its “third neighbor” policy that seeks to hedge its dependence on China and Russia by maintaining active relations with the West, Japan, and India.

### ***Russia and Chinese economic initiatives in Eurasia***

The economic foundation of Eurasian continentalism is being formed by China-led multi-lateral projects, such as the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Collectively, they add up to a grand plan of creating a single – Sino-centric – economic space in Eurasia (“Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road,” 2015). Russia was initially wary of these Chinese initiatives, fearing that they would compete with its own project of Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) that seeks to (re)integrate the post-Soviet space under Moscow’s aegis. However, the conflict with the West and the deteriorating condition of Russia’s economy has left Moscow with little choice other than bandwagoning with China’s Eurasian schemes. In late March 2015, Russia joined AIIB, becoming the third largest AIIB shareholder after China and India (“Graphics: AIIB Voting Stakes,” 2015). In May 2015, Putin and Xi agreed to coordinate their flagship economic initiatives in Central Asia – Russian-led EEU and China’s SREB. In their joint declaration, the parties pledged “to make coordinated efforts toward the integration of constructing EEU and SREB,” with SCO serving as the main platform for linking up the two Eurasian initiatives. The document also mentioned “a long-term goal of progressing toward a free trade zone between EEU and China” (“Joint Declaration by the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China on the Coordination of the Construction of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Silk Road Economic Belt,” 2015).

In June 2016, speaking at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum, Putin called for the formation of a “major Eurasian partnership” that would encompass EEU and other states in continental Eurasia, such as China, India, Iran, and Pakistan. Putin also announced the start of EEU-China negotiations on a comprehensive economic cooperation agreement, highlighting the central role Beijing is destined to play in Moscow’s project of “Greater Eurasia” (Putin, 2016). However, the EEU-China economic partnership talks that were formally launched during Putin’s visit to Beijing in late June 2016 are focused on trade and investment facilitation measures, not a full-fledged FTA. Russian officials recognize that the EEU member states “are not yet in a position for a deep market opening” with China (Fedorov, 2016). In addition, the glaring incompatibility in regulations, such as technical, veterinary, and phytosanitary standards, is a major barrier to be overcome if EEU and China are to achieve any meaningful level of economic integration (Fedorov, 2016). Even in its current bilateral format – between the Russian-led EEU and China – the Eurasian partnership negotiations are going to be a difficult and drawn-out process, let alone if this undertaking is to be subsequently joined by other proposed participants, such as India or ASEAN countries.

### ***Composing a concert for Eurasia?***

As always, Moscow’s main game is political rather than economic. The Kremlin cannot but understand that in the trade and finance realm Russia’s position in Eurasia is much weaker than

that of China and probably even India. Russia's crucial strengths traditionally lie in the political-military and diplomatic domain. Hence Moscow strives for the role of the chief architect of a Eurasian political order that would reflect its own preferences and chime with the basic interests of the continent's major powers.

The kind of political order that Russia envisions for Eurasia is essentially one of a concert of powers – a model that puts a premium on relations among a few major powers.<sup>14</sup> These are Russia itself, China, and India, plus – with some qualifications – Pakistan and Iran. Accounting for the bulk of continental Eurasia's population, landmass, and military potential, the five big players could collectively manage security and economic affairs of the mega-region. Their collective governance would be based on, and legitimized by, a set of institutions, especially the Sino-Russian strategic partnership and SCO.

Russia aspires to be the main security and diplomatic broker in a concert of Eurasia, while leaving China with the role of the economic leader. This division of labor is already emerging in Central Asia, where, as Alexander Gabuev put it, "China would be the bank and Russia would be the big gun" (Standish, 2015). Such an arrangement might resemble the initial stages of the European Community when France acted as the political leader while West Germany was the economic engine.

Moscow's preference for a new Eurasian order is reflected in its diplomatic activism such as its leading role in securing Indian and Pakistani admission into SCO and advocacy for Iran's future membership. Moscow's interest in their participation in SCO partly stems from the desire to hedge against the rising influence of China. For all the friendship with China, Moscow is keen to prevent Beijing's domination of continental Eurasia. In this vein, when it comes to the game of institutions, instead of whole-heartedly subscribing to China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) scheme, Moscow promotes its own vision of "a larger Eurasian partnership," or "Greater Eurasia," which is presented as a network of existing and emerging "integration formats" including EEU, OBOR, SCO, ASEAN, and potentially even the EU (Putin 2017).

### **Construction of a new security architecture for the Asia-Pacific: building a counter-narrative to US hegemony**

Even though Russia has recently shifted its primary attention to institution-building in continental Eurasia, Moscow does have its own vision for an international order in East Asia and the Asia-Pacific, which it is promoting in the region's diplomatic forums. Such an order would be a "transparent, open, comprehensive, equal and indivisible security architecture, based on the primacy of international law, mutual trust, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-use of force." Moscow sees the East Asia Summit (EAS) as "the key element" in constructing the proposed security architecture (Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016). The crux of the Russia-proposed institutional architecture for the Asia-Pacific lies in its critique of "closed and semi-closed" security mechanisms, a thinly veiled reference to US-centric alliances and partnerships. These should be superseded by an "umbrella structure that must bring together all the Asia-Pacific states without exception, assuming the task of developing uniform rules of behavior for all participants on a non-bloc basis" ("Russian Foreign Minister S. Lavrov's remarks," 2016).

Pursuing this vision, in 2013 Russia initiated a series of consultations among the EAS members in order to "promote multilateral dialogue on the formation of the regional security architecture" (Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016). Moscow's initiative was supported by Beijing. As of February 2017, five rounds of consultations, in the format of workshops, have



been held, hosted by Brunei (November 2013), Russia (April 2014), Indonesia (October 2014), Cambodia (July 2015; co-organized with India), and China (June 2016, co-organized with Laos). The 2017 host is Thailand.

That China backs Russia's pitch for a "new security architecture" is unsurprising. In 2010, Dmitry Medvedev and Hu Jintao issued a joint statement in which they came up with an "initiative to strengthen security in the Asia-Pacific." The 2010 initiative uses almost the same wording as found in the subsequent Russian proposals. In particular, the Sino-Russian statement called for "the creation in the Asia-Pacific region of an open, transparent and equal architecture of security and cooperation, based on the principles of international law, non-bloc approaches and respect for legitimate interests of all parties." It also emphasized that "it is important that all the states of the region renounce confrontation and do not cooperate against the third countries" ("Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on comprehensive deepening of Sino-Russian relations of partnership and strategic interaction," 2010). The origins of this narrative can be traced to the second half of the 1990s when Sino-Russian strategic rapprochement was beginning to take shape. In the Russia-China Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and Formation of a New International Order (1997), Boris Yeltsin and Jiang Zemin took a stand against "bloc politics" and "hegemony," calling for a "new comprehensive concept of security."

However, it would be incorrect to explain Moscow's security architecture initiative exclusively by the Sino-Russian strategic axis. In fact, Russia's proposals for the Asia-Pacific mirror its push for the European Security Treaty. The draft treaty, proposed in 2009 by the then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, called for an "indivisible and equal security" in the Euro-Atlantic space. The core of the draft was the idea that the parties to the treaty must refrain from taking steps that could "significantly affect" the security of other participants. Moscow's proposal made very little progress, as it met with a cool response from most of the NATO and EU members, who interpreted the draft treaty as Russia's desire to gain a veto power over the matters of Euro-Atlantic security, such as admitting new countries to NATO.

Interestingly, the key reference to "indivisible security" found in Russia's proposals both for the Asia-Pacific and Europe is a flashback to the Soviet Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov's famous dictum in the 1930s that "peace is indivisible." Now, as in the 1930s, the emphasis on indivisible security and opposition to political-military blocs reflects Moscow's sense of vulnerability and fear of isolation. In the 1930s, the Soviet Union was fearful that the Western powers would leave it on its own to face the Nazi aggression. Nowadays Moscow is struggling with the notion that it has to live with the powerful – and expanding – NATO alliance on its borders that marginalizes, and potentially threatens, Russia.

Russia's opposition to US-led alliances in the Asia-Pacific has never been as intense as its hostility to NATO's enlargement in Europe, because East Asia is largely not considered so vital for Russian security. Still, Moscow would prefer to have Washington's alliance system in the Asia-Pacific greatly diminished. The reasoning is simple: US alliances are indispensable for maintaining US global hegemony; hence the weakening of its alliances in a region as crucial as the Asia-Pacific would contribute to Moscow's professed goal of a multi-polar world free of the single superpower hegemony.

Moscow is under no illusion that its advocacy of a non-bloc security order for the Asia-Pacific is able to undermine the preponderance of US-centric alliances any time soon. Even in Europe, where Russia has a much bigger influence, the Kremlin's efforts to create a viable region-wide alternative to NATO as the main guarantor of security have so far failed. Rather, the primary goal of Russia's political campaign in the Asia-Pacific is a long-term one and involves building a narrative that counters the currently dominant discourse of US

alliances as the cornerstone of the Asia-Pacific's stability and prosperity that "have underwritten regional peace and security" since the end of the World War II and must continue to do so (Clinton, 2011). This essentially constructivist effort to shape the ideational environment may bear fruit if and when strategic material conditions in the region change in the right direction. The rise in China's material capabilities and the resulting shifts in the balance of power in East Asia may give Moscow some grounds for optimism in this respect. Some US alliances in the region are showing visible cracks, with some of the junior allies and partners drifting away from Washington to Beijing (Thailand, Malaysia) or hedging their bets trying to maneuver between China and the United States (South Korea, the Philippines). At some point, the accumulated effects of the shifting power and loyalties, backed by an alternative security order discourse, could lead to significant transformations in the region's political landscape, possibly the emergence of new institutions replacing the current dominance of the US hub-and-spoke system.

It would be wrong to assume that Russia's pursuit of a new security architecture for the Asia-Pacific is motivated exclusively by its hostility to US hegemony. In fact, Russia is opposed to *any* hegemony, be it the United States' or China's. Like in Eurasia, Moscow's preferred vision for the Asia-Pacific is one of a concert of great powers, with Russia being a key participant. Other great powers in the Asia-Pacific Concert could include China, the United States, India, Japan, and potentially Indonesia and a unified Korea. Consolidated ASEAN, as a collective strategic actor, is essential for such a multi-polar order. In Russia's view, a strong ASEAN, capable of acting as one cohesive pole, can serve as a powerful counterweight to both US and Chinese attempts at hegemony in the Asia-Pacific, even though the China-hedging component of this vision is being kept implicit, for now.

### Conclusion

The story of Russia's engagement with Asian and Pacific institutions can mostly be told in realist terms. Moscow has viewed regional bodies as instruments to promote national interests, secure Russia a seat at the decision-making table, or at least affirm Russia's status as a great Asia-Pacific power. In the same realist vein, Russia's main emphasis has been on institutions with a political-security agenda, while its participation in regional economic arrangements, such as FTAs, has been minimal.

While realism undoubtedly remains the main foundation of Moscow's strategic thinking, some constructivist elements have lately begun to feature more prominently, impacting Russia's approaches to Asian and Pacific institutions. This is noticeable in Russia's efforts to design and promote the vision of Eurasian continentalism, or "Greater Eurasia," which is institutionally based on the Moscow-Beijing strategic axis, SCO, and, implicitly, concert-of-power arrangements. To a significant extent, "Greater Eurasia" is being constructed as the antithesis to the Western-dominated liberal world order.

For all Moscow's infatuation with "Greater Eurasia," there are formidable difficulties involved in constructing the new order – from inherent fragility of many of its putative members to fraught relations between some of them. There is also a risk that, even if a concert of Eurasia takes shape, Russia may be overshadowed by its more powerful players such as China and later possibly India.

Even though Russia's interest in the Pacific dimension of the Asia-Pacific institutional architecture has since noticeably declined, having reached its high point at the Vladivostok APEC summit in 2012, Moscow still continues to have a stake in institutions that center on East Asia and the Pacific. Similar to continental Eurasia, Russia's vision for the Asia-Pacific order is

essentially that of a concert of powers. To construct such an order, the entrenched structures of US hegemony in the Pacific need to be undone first. This is why Moscow is tirelessly promoting the narrative of a security architecture that should be “open, transparent, equal, non-bloc.”

The Kremlin is well aware that its leverage in the vast East Asian/Pacific space is quite limited. Russia’s geopolitical influence and vital interests are mostly concentrated in Northeast Asia/North Pacific, where Russia shares borders with China, Korea, Japan, and the United States. Significantly, Northeast Asia is characterized by an “organization gap” (Calder and Min Ye, 2010), essentially lacking regional institutions. Moscow has been actively advocating for the SPT, whose initial aim was to deal with the North Korea nuclear problem, to become the basis for a future multilateral mechanism in charge of political and security cooperation in Northeast Asia (“Remarks on the Developments on the Korean Peninsula and the Prospects for Re-launching of the Six-Party Talks,” 2011). Moscow sees SPT as a concert-like arrangement that would help legitimize and solidify Russia’s role as a key stakeholder in the region. The rising intensity of security problems in Northeast Asia, particularly those related to the Korean Peninsula, can make the idea of a Northeast Asian political-security institution even more relevant, providing Russia with an opportunity to realize its preferred institutional designs, at least in this part of the Asia-Pacific.

### Notes

- 1 This chapter draws extensively upon the previously published chapter by Artyom Lukin (“Russia’s institutional engagement with the Asia-Pacific: getting more Asian and less Pacific.” In *Regional Institutions, Geopolitics and Economics in the Asia Pacific: Evolving interests and strategies*. Edited by Steven B. Rothman, Utpal Vyas, and Yoichiro Sato. Routledge, 2017).
- 2 That was upgraded from the status of a “consultative partner” of ASEAN that Moscow received in 1991.
- 3 The membership of ADMM-Plus exactly corresponds to EAS.
- 4 This was compounded by Russia’s non-participation in WTO. Russian accession to WTO was not approved until December 2011.
- 5 As of February 2017, EEU includes Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan.
- 6 One of the casualties of the Ukraine crisis is Russia’s prospective membership in the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Long before its present standoff with the West, Moscow applied to join ADB but was denied entry by Japan and the United States, the countries wielding the greatest decision-making power in the multilateral financial institution. Still there remained hope that sooner or later Russia would be admitted. The fallout from the Ukraine mess foreclosed this possibility.
- 7 In 2011–13, Russia was represented in EAS summit meetings by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, while in 2014, 2015 and 2016 Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev attended the summits. Incidentally, China’s highest representative to EAS has always been the premier (number two) rather than the president (number one). It is telling that Moscow eventually followed Beijing’s example in setting its own level of EAS representation.
- 8 The previous two summits took place in 2005 in Kuala Lumpur and in 2010 in Hanoi.
- 9 By “continental Eurasia” I mean the area more or less corresponding to Russia, Central Asia, China, Mongolia, South Asia, Afghanistan and Iran.
- 10 SCO’s precursor had been “The Shanghai Five” (Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) who, in 1996 and 1997, signed two multilateral agreements on confidence building measures and troops reductions in their adjacent border areas.
- 11 SCO has a dedicated counter-terror arm, Regional Anti-Terror Structure, based in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.
- 12 That said, Beijing would like to enhance an economic integration component in SCO’s activities, something that Moscow until recently was reluctant to do due to fears of losing Central Asia economically to China.
- 13 For example, in 2005 Russia and China initiated an SCO collective decision to call on the United States to withdraw its military forces from Central Asia.
- 14 According to Muthiah Alagappa, concert is joint management of international affairs by great powers on the basis of certain common goals, values and interests (Alagappa, 2003: 55).

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