

Russia and Regional Multilateral Security

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There is a sharp contrast between how Russia views NATO and issues of European security and how Russia views the US-led security alliances in Asia with Japan (JASA) and Korea (KASA). While NATO expansion has triggered a large Russian diplomatic counter-offensive and a gust of criticism in the Russian press and scholarly publications, efforts to maintain and even revitalize JASA and KASA have been ignored or treated neutrally--even sympathetically. Since Yeltsin's trips to Tokyo and Seoul in November 1993, Russia has formally praised US alliances with Japan and Korea as enhancing regional security. NATO and the Asian alliances were established during the height of the Cold War with the primary but not sole mission of containing Soviet power. With the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, Russia's disparate views on US alliances in Europe and Asia might seem puzzling.

The contrasting Russian responses to the expansion of NATO in the West and the strengthening of JASA and KASA in the East can be explained by two key factors:

- Russia's status as a declining power seeking to maintain its influence in neighboring regions; and
- Russia's vision of desirable multilateral security systems in Europe and Northeast Asia.
- In other words, whether Russian foreign policy elite view the US-led alliances from a realist, balance-of-power framework or from a more liberal framework emphasizing multilateralism and interdependence, they reach similar conclusions.

Before elucidating this issue, however, I must raise an important caveat. While Russia views the regional alliances differently, the development of Russian relations with the West in the security field have failed to meet Moscow's initial expectations after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Russia anticipated sharing responsibility for multilateral security in both Europe and Asia with the United States and other leading regional powers. A fairly representative 1992 report from the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), a leading Moscow foreign policy think tank, suggested that in the initial post-Cold War years, Russia's key task would be to jointly compensate with other powers for the likely diminution, but not disappearance, of US military presence in various regions of the world.

The ensuing reality has markedly diverged from this vision. Russia generally perceives an expansion of US and West European influence in European security affairs at its expense coupled with a growing Chinese challenge in the Asia Pacific, where the US role has remained stable. As a rapidly declining superpower still clinging to its former international role, Russia has seen the cornerstone of its strategic and political orientations shift to preservation of the status quo and stability.

Explained from a balance-of-power perspective, Russia's different views of regional security systems stem from the enduring Cold War mind-set that categorizes Europe essentially as a bipolar region and Asia as a multipolar region. In this paradigm, NATO expansion is a zero-sum game in which Russia is the loser as the military balance in the region increasingly favors the West. In Moscow, leading liberals agree with communist and nationalist politicians that NATO expansion represents a breakdown of the geopolitical status quo and threatens core Russian interests. It is hardly surprising that Russia would hold this view. While liberal proponents of NATO expansion argue for expanding a security community that one day could even include Russia, conservatives in the West view expansion primarily as a hedge against potentially malign Russian power.

While in Europe, Russia views the US and its allies as impinging on its interests, in Asia the US is viewed as the primary guarantor of the status quo, and a possible partner in maintaining regional stability vis-à-vis an emergent China. Notwithstanding the considerable improvement in Sino-Russian relations and their developing "strategic partnership," the consensus view in Russian foreign and military policy circles is that China is a potential threat. The stark juxtaposition of the power trajectories of these two great powers is deeply unsettling for Russia, even absent malign Chinese intent. Russian scholars and policymakers also view JASA as useful in preventing the emergence of a more independent and militarized Japan, which would further erode Russia's security position in Asia.

Russia's position supporting multilateral regional security systems in Europe and Asia also lead it to similar conclusions about the existing US-led alliances. During the Soviet period, leaders in Moscow repeatedly called for multilateral security arrangements in Europe and Asia, but the primary motive then was to either reduce the role of US power, or better yet to eliminate it altogether. This was particularly true, for example, with Brezhnev's proposal for a collective security pact in Asia in 1969. Today, however, Russia supports regional multilateral security arrangements as a means to ensure that its voice and interests are not ignored. The grave debilitation of Russian military power, always the primary Soviet calling card of influence, leaves Moscow feeling particularly enfeebled and ignored as an international player.

While Russia desires a voice in multilateral security arrangements in Europe and Asia, it finds the current circumstances in each region quite different. In Europe there are two major institutions specifically developed to promote regional security, NATO and the OSCE. It is well known that Russia has promoted the OSCE as the institution which should play the leading role in European security in the post-Cold War period. With the OSCE Russia may claim an historic leading role supported by the principle of consensus

in which no decision may be approved without Moscow's consent. While the May 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act allows more of a consultative role for Russia, Moscow remains at best on the periphery of the organization, if not its opponent. NATO's expansion is widely assessed as a factor undermining the significance of the OSCE and as a major diplomatic defeat for Russia in the region traditionally considered most important for its security.

In the Asia Pacific, which lacks significant institutionalization of a multilateral security system, there are not obvious choices as there are in Europe. And since the 1990s the United States and Russia have generally recognized the need for broader multilateral security cooperation. The only organization to discuss regional security issues is the Asian Regional Forum (ARF) which was established in 1992 with Russia as its member from the beginning. But the ARF so far serves mainly as a forum for discussion, and its operational role is even less significant than the OSCE.

While Moscow's proclaimed goal of a multipolar world often pushes Russia to closer cooperation with Asian partners other than the United States, the notion of a regional multilateral security system is exceedingly important for Russian strategy because it represents the only hope to maintain great-power status. Given the lack of an existing institutional basis for multilateral security in Asia, Russia is more inclined to view the US-led alliances, JASA and KASA, as the kernel for the development of multilateral arrangements in the future. Indeed, Russia's current foreign and security policymaking apparatus, to the extent that one can realistically speak of such a coherent group today, silently recognizes that its "strategic cooperation" with China has likely reached its peak and now requires counterbalancing in the form of an improved security dialogue with the United States, Japan, and South Korea.

Russia is concerned that despite its positive assessment of JASA and KASA, the United States seeks further isolation of Russia and its elimination as a powerful regional actor. Leading Russian analysts have argued that the US has been more reluctant to treat Russia as a regional power in Asia since the dissolution of the Soviet Union--despite the fact that Russia has geographically become more Asian and less European. When trying to court potential US adversaries in the region (China, India, and North Korea, for example), the logic of Russian behavior is determined primarily by its feeling of alienation and neglect, therefore requiring consolidation of new leverage to bolster its presence in the region. Unfortunately, Russia may come to view reversion to a "bad guy role" as its best tactic to induce a more cooperative US response (e.g., with respect to North Korea). In fact, we continually hear such threats from Mr. Primakov and other Russian officials despite the fact that it hardly seems in Russia's long-term interests to really act on such threats.

The main policy implication from this argument is that an opportunity now exists for the US to seriously engage in promoting multilateral security in Asia. Perhaps the lack of any overarching security institution is actually a plus as the existing institutions in Europe, for example, are tainted by their Cold War origins. While today the United States enjoys its virtually unprecedented status as global hegemon, history would argue that this period of unipolar dominance will be transitory. The emerging powers which could challenge US

interests in the next century are likely to be in Asia: China, India, Japan, and Russia. The development of more robust multilateral security arrangements will be a very long-term endeavor, but it should be easier to act in a far-sighted manner when you are in a position of strength as the US clearly is today.

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