

Russian perceptions and policies in a multipolar East Asia under Yeltsin and Putin

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Abstract

While the desire to counterbalance US unilateralism informed Russian perceptions and advocacy of multipolarity globally, the complex and fluid balance of power in a multipolar East Asia complicates Russian perceptions and policies of multipolarity regionally and counterbalancing US power became not the sole goal. Russia's aim in East Asia was to reassert its influence while ensuring a stable regional environment in order for Russia to restore itself as a great power. However, the relatively stabilizing US regional role, the rise of neighboring China, the prospects of Japanese remilitarization and strengthened US–Japanese military alliance, and the lack of a Northeast Asian security structure are factors that pose both challenges and opportunities for Russian policy-makers in pursuing Russian interests and great-power aims. Such factors have served to make Russian perceptions and policy in East Asia somewhat contradictory. While Russia's great-power aspiration was

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relatively clear, the policies to achieve this remained vague and inconclusive.

1 Introduction

Many of Russia's foreign-policy elite, ranging from official-governmental actors, the military high command, politicians, and policy analysts, have advocated the notion of a multipolar post-Cold War world.¹ Such espousals were a frequent feature in official statements of both Yeltsin and Putin. Multipolarity not only informed Russia's foreign-policy thinking generally but also its thinking toward East Asia, which encompasses the countries of Northeast and Southeast Asia. Although Russia's role in East Asia became marginal following the collapse of the Soviet Union, essentially due to internal turmoil and preoccupation with economic, political, and social transformation, Russia has consistently seen itself as a Eurasian power with a justified right to have a say in East Asian affairs (Rangsimaporn, 2006a). Since 1996, and especially under Putin, Russian diplomacy has become increasingly active, confident, and aimed at reasserting Russian influence in this region, not only politically but also economically through such tools as arms and energy exports.

To best understand Russia's East Asia policy, one must first understand how Russia sees East Asia and its role there. The article argues that Russia's role in East Asia as seen by its foreign policy elite is preconditioned by two interrelated concepts – Russian self-perception of, or self-longing for, being a great power, and perceptions of a multipolar East Asia, in which balance-of-power thinking informs much of Russian reasoning. On a global level, Moscow was primarily concerned with growing US unilateralism and perceived a multipolar world as best corresponding to its aim of restraining US power while enhancing its own (Ambrosio, 2005). On the East Asian level, however, Moscow must not

1 The Russian foreign-policy elite is defined as those actors who, by their occupation, have substantial potential to affect foreign policy, and have a high level of informed opinion due to their expertise and greater access to information (Zimmerman, 2002, p. 21). Owing to the increasingly centralized nature of foreign-policy-making under Putin, more 'weight' should generally be attached to views held, and statements issued, by official-governmental actors, especially those of the President and his office, and the Foreign Ministry. On Russian foreign policy actors, see Trenin and Lo (2005, pp. 9–14).

only contend with the United States but also other powers, namely China and Japan, and act within a relatively fluid multipolar environment in which Cold War mindsets and realist balance-of-power thinking still exerts much influence on the foreign policy of each regional power.² Russia also sees regional security structures through this realist prism, supporting multilateralism as one relatively inexpensive way to constrain other powers, including the United States, by enmeshing them in the rules and norms of multilateral regional security structures like the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Russia is also in favor of establishing an East Asian Concert of Powers, not necessarily substituting the existing regional security structures, but as a complementary mechanism more consonant with Russia's multipolar thinking, its aspirations for possessing great-power status, and the need to maintain a stable external environment to pursue much-needed internal reforms.

The article focuses on the period from 1996, when Russia's East Asia diplomacy and multipolar thinking became more noticeable since Primakov became foreign minister, up to during Putin's second term when Russia appeared increasingly confident and active in East Asia. It firstly briefly examines Russian aspirations to re-establish its great-power status, an aim more clearly defined under Putin and one pursued more pragmatically. Secondly, Russia's thinking behind multipolarity from Yeltsin to Putin is examined, looking at the different policy implications this concept has at the global level. Thirdly, the article examines Russian perceptions and policies in a multipolar East Asia, focusing on the need to reconcile Russian aspirations to constrain the US power and the US–Japanese military partnership with latent fears of a rising China. Lastly, the Russian elite's thinking regarding East Asian security would be examined, namely the support for a Concert-of-Powers structure perhaps based on the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear program. In Russia's view, such a format with Russian participation would ensure Russia's continuing influence and presence in East Asian affairs as befits its self-perceived entitled great-power status.

2 The term 'realist' employed here refers to behaviour which is often attributed to states operating within the confines of a Realist theory of international relations such as the balance of power and zero-sum politics. Thus, 'realist' here refers to behaviour or manner of thought, but not as reference to the explanatory impact of Realism on state behaviour. See Legro and Moravcsik (1999).

2 Russia's great-power aspirations

While there were some who harbored hopes of restoring a 'Russian empire' in its Near Abroad, it was clear to the majority of the Russian elite that Russia was incapable of becoming a superpower again, at least in the foreseeable future, given the current status of economic and social development. Nonetheless, most believed that Russia has, or will soon acquire, great-power status due to its large nuclear arsenal, vast territory, permanent membership of the UN Security Council, and the huge potentialities of its economy.³ As Primakov stressed during his first press conference after becoming foreign minister, 'Russia was and remains a great power' ('Primakov wants "great"', 1996). Russia's geopolitical position in Europe and Asia also informs much of the elite's belief in Russia's great-power destiny. For instance, the 1997 National Security Concept termed Russia a 'European-Asian power' the foreign policy of which is determined by 'its unique strategic location on the Eurasian continent' ('Kontseptsiia natsionalnoi', 1998, p. 4). However, statements issuing great-power aspirations remained unconvincing if Russia did not sufficiently have the necessary attributes to become one, attributes that were often lacking under Yeltsin. As Putin well understood, Russia would have to build up its power first in order to be taken seriously in East Asia and globally.

Putin's aim was a pragmatic one, not necessarily of restoring past Tsarist or Soviet glory, but to realize Russia's status as a 'normal' great power, turning Russia into a full-fledged member of the international community and emphasizing economic modernization and development as the foundation for restoring Russia's greatness (Tsygankov, 2005). Putin has repeatedly stated his belief in Russia's great-power status. In December 1999, he asserted that 'Russia was and will remain a great power...conditioned by the inherent qualities of its geopolitical, economic, and cultural essence' (Putin, 1999). In 2003, his pragmatic focus on establishing Russia as a great power primarily through economic strength was evident when he declared that 'our ultimate goal should be to return Russia to its place among the prosperous, developed, strong and respected nations', which 'will only be possible when Russia gains

3 This commitment to great-power status (*velikoderzhavnost'*) was at the heart of Russia's culture and psyche (Shakleyina and Bogaturov, 2004, p. 49).

economic power' (Putin, 2003). It is highly doubtful that Putin's great-power aim would be discontinued by the new president, Dmitrii Medvedev, given Russia's growing confidence and economy buoyed by rising energy prices, though this has recently been set back by the global financial crisis. It appears certain that there will be some foreign-policy continuity given that Medvedev is beholden to Putin, has long been loyal to him, and has Putin as his prime minister. Russia's new foreign policy concept in 2008 supports this view of continuity ('Foreign Policy Concept', 2008). But an increasingly confident Russia is also determined to maintain its sphere of influence in its Near Abroad through military means if need be as Russia's August 2008 incursion into Georgia over the conflict in South Ossetia shows. Russia, under the dual leadership of Medvedev and Putin, sent a strong signal to the West that Russia remains a force to be reckoned with. Thus, Russia will likely continue to pursue its great-power ambitions in a transforming multipolar world, including in a multipolar East Asia, where there lay both challenges and opportunities to Russian interests and great-power aims.

3 Multipolarity and Russian foreign policy

Multipolarity was not a new concept for the post-Soviet elite. Soviet literature on international relations since the mid-1960s had started to recognize the increasing importance of countries like China and Japan. The growing Chinese threat to the Soviet Union and Nixon's 'triangular diplomacy' in the early 1970s threatened to isolate the Soviet Union, and the Soviet elite gradually began to view international and regional politics in a more complex and less binary light. Moreover, the Soviets expressed preference for multipolarity to bipolarity as the former was considered more realistic in reflecting the new centers of imperialist competition and centrifugal tendencies associated with the increased influence of developing countries in international affairs (Light, 1988, pp. 280–284). In the post-Soviet period, the Russian elite's initial expectations of being treated as an equal power by the United States in a strategic condominium on international affairs were soon dashed as the US acted increasingly unilaterally, often disregarding Russian concerns. By the mid-1990s, even a prominent 'pro-Western' figure like Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev began to argue that the twenty-first-century

world would be multipolar, including that of interstate relations in the Asia-Pacific (Kozyrev, 1994, p. 7; Akaha, 1995, p. 100).

However, post-Soviet advocacy of multipolarity has often been associated with Evgenii Primakov since it was frequently espoused in official foreign-policy statements when he became foreign minister in January 1996. This 'Primakov Doctrine' pointed to the desirability of multipolarity based on the premise that this best reflected the evolving objective reality of the international system and took into account the interests of major states, including Russia's, and would therefore lead to greater stability (Primakov, 1996, 1997, p. 4). Drawing inspiration from Prince Aleksandr Gorchakov, Russia's foreign minister after its Crimean War defeat in 1856, Primakov perceived Russia's challenges in the 1990s as similar to that of Gorchakov's – international marginalization and internal weaknesses. To ensure the necessary stable environment for domestic development, Russian foreign policy had to be balanced and should avoid unnecessary confrontation. Like Gorchakov, Primakov believed that to achieve the resurrection of Russia's great-power status required an active and diversified foreign policy, in which Russia not only relied on its own strength but could always exploit the resentment felt by lesser powers against a leading power like the United States (Primakov, 1998; Splidsboel-Hansen, 2002).

Primakov's idea of multipolarity from 1996 to 1999 was thus often perceived by the West as Moscow's attempts to counter the growing US unilateralism in world affairs. For instance, former US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott saw Primakov's view of US–Russian relations as essentially and eternally a 'zero-sum game' (Talbott, 2002, p. 296). But this view may be too simplistic. As Katz (2006, pp. 145–146) pointed out, Primakov did not want to revive the Cold War but rather to create a situation in which Washington would respect Russian interests and treat it as an equal partner. Indeed, Primakov's multipolarity could arguably be best understood as 'revised bipolarity': Russia acting in concert with other powers in balancing US policies on specific issues at various times (Lo, 2002a, p.108). One such power was China. While good relations with China undoubtedly had its own inherent benefits, Russo-Chinese relations were also driven by their shared concern over excessive US power (Wilson, 2004), despite official Russian denials. For instance, Russia's Foreign Ministry presented the April 1996 Russo-Chinese 'strategic partnership', which acknowledged the developing trend toward a

multipolar world, and the 1997 'Joint Declaration of a Multipolar World and the Formation of a New International Order' as neither aimed at third parties, i.e. the United States, nor a military alliance between the two neighbors. Nonetheless, the latter Declaration did include a thinly-disguised criticism of the West's interference in both countries' internal affairs and an attack on NATO enlargement ('Joint Statement', 1996; 'Joint Russo-Chinese Declaration', 1997).

Primakovian multipolarity was also illustrative of the enduring legacy of Russia's great-power status in the mindset of its foreign-policy elite. Russia as a great power could not accept being a less than equal partner to the United States on the international arena, but simultaneously realized it could not, given its economic, political, and social turmoil, become a rival, or equal partner, to the United States. A multipolar world was thus considered as the best international structure for restraining US influence while enhancing Russia's. While multipolarity became official policy and was espoused by much of the foreign policy elite, this tacit consensus was based on the *subjective* desirability of a stable multipolar world. The *objective* reality of the international order, however, remained subjected to debate (Arin, 2001, pp. 160–179), although the consensus appeared to be 'pluralistic unipolarity' or 'asymmetric multipolarity', with the United States dominating along with a constellation of other smaller powers – a mixture of global unipolarity and regional multipolarity (Bogaturov, 1997, p. 49; Rogov, 2001; Pavlov, 2003; Torkunov, 2005, p. 287). However, most believed that the world is in the process of becoming multipolar (e.g. Zhirnov, 2001; Bazhanov, 2003). Furthermore, what 'objectively' constitutes a 'pole' or a 'power centre' remained debated upon by Russian specialists ('Is the World', 1998), including whether Russia could be seen as one 'pole' or not in the present and future international power configuration.⁴ Therefore, multipolarity as a foreign-policy concept still lacked conceptual clarity and was often open to different interpretations of its policy implications. For instance, while Russia's multipolarity was interpreted by many Western observers as anti-Western/United States, Russian analysts and officials often depicted it as a diversification of Russia's foreign policy, allowing it greater flexibility in world affairs. This different interpretation is indicative

4 The emerging consensual definition of a 'pole' among Russian scholars can be identified as 'a power centre with considerable potential: military; economic; political; and desire or will to regulate world processes' (Shakleyina and Bogaturov, 2004, p. 38, fn. 2).

of the subtle difference in the understanding of the concept during the Yeltsin and Putin administrations. Moreover, what multipolarity entailed for actual foreign policy varied not only from different foreign-policy actors but also from the global to regional East Asian level.

3.1 Multipolarity: from Yeltsin to Putin

Although a multipolar world remained a key objective in the Putin-approved Foreign Policy Concept of 2000 ('Kontseptsia Vneshnei'), there were some indications that Putin's view of multipolarity was different to that of Primakov's during the Yeltsin period. The Putin administration could not fail to learn from the mistakes made under the Primakovian understanding of multipolarity in the late 1990s. Indeed, if Primakovian multipolarity was fundamentally based on constraining the US power, then Primakov's policy arguably failed two key tests regarding NATO enlargement and the US-led bombing campaign of Yugoslavia. Moreover, while it was fine to (re)establish relations with key non-Western states and emerging 'power centers' to counter US power, these relationships were unlikely to yield any benefits for Russia if Russia lacked the requisite resources to render benefits in return. According to prominent critics like Sergei Karaganov, chairman of the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy, Primakov's policy was overly ambitious, exceeding Russia's real available resources and influence. Karaganov advised that Russia should first follow a more moderate policy – to strengthen the economy, rebuild the state, and establish favorable economic relations with leading Western countries, and only then to try to challenge the West. Furthermore, Karaganov argued that multipolarity suited China's interests more than Russia's as China was in an economically better position to counter US power, while Moscow's advocacy of multipolarity was being used as an instrument wielded by China ('Karaganov interview', 2000; Karaganov *et al.*, 2000). Indeed, Russia's East Asia policy has been to a large extent Sino-centric and there were growing concerns that Russia was becoming too dependent on China as will be shown.

In light of the Yeltsin experience, Putin realized that Russia can only encourage the establishment of a multipolar world when Russia itself is a politically stable and economically vibrant country (Bajarunas, 2002, p. 3). Putin understood that Russia cannot afford to pursue a competitive or semi-confrontational form of multipolarity as advocated by Primakov, and that Russia had to act in a more cooperative manner with Western powers. Putin

instead embraced the ideas of cooperative balance similar to those embodied in the notion of a Concert of Powers, in which the *raison d'être* was more flexible than Primakovian multipolarity. The objective became not so much to constrain the United States *per se*, but rather to obtain a broader *status quo* in which more or less 'equal players' moderated one another and restrained the assertiveness of the regional superpower, whoever that might be (Lo, 2003, pp. 77–80). In other words, Putin moved toward a more general notion of a balance of power in his concept of multipolarity as opposed to Primakov's and Yeltsin's somewhat more specific balance against the West. Relations with Europe became significant in Putin's view of multipolarity as he understood that failure to develop a close equal partnership with Europe would leave a presently weakened Russia frustrated at US-led unipolarity, while seeking strategic partnerships in Asia that had so far proved to be of limited value (Smith, 2000, p. 28). After September 11, Putin initially moved even more toward the West, allowing the United States to set up base in Central Asia, Russia's traditional sphere of influence. In relation to East Asia and Asia generally, Putin tried to avoid overdependence on relations with one particular country, namely China, and attempted a more diversified and balanced policy than that under Primakov. Indeed, Putin aimed toward giving Russia the necessary flexibility in international affairs and to avoid excessive dependence on either the West or the East at the global level, and on China in East Asia. However, the 2003 US-led war on Iraq in the face of Russian and Chinese opposition, the lack of substantial US concessions on strategic arms reduction, the US abrogation of the ABM Treaty and its plans to install missile defense systems in Eastern Europe, the continued eastwards expansion of NATO, and US support during 2003–05 for the so-called 'color revolutions' in the post-Soviet space all prompted Putin to revise his previous Western-engagement strategy to adopt a less cooperative stance. Putin and Chinese President Hu Jintao soon re-emphasized the development of a multipolar world in May 2003 ('Joint Declaration', 2003). This was reaffirmed in a 2005 'Joint Statement on the International Order of the 21st Century', which was also circulated within the UN (Vnukov, 2006, p. 133). In Putin's Munich speech (Putin, 2007), unilateralist actions and unipolarity were vociferously condemned. The Russian Foreign Policy Survey, approved by Putin in March 2007, also criticized unipolarity while advocating multipolarity ('Obzor Vneshnei', 2007). Primakov himself joined in the chorus of criticism of the United States, asserting that by ignoring the 'objective reality' of a

multipolar world order by pursuing unilateralist actions, the United States is ‘doomed to failure’ (Primakov, 2008, p. 34). Thus, in light of growing disagreements with the West, Putin’s second term saw a more hardened stance adopted and Russian advocacy for multipolarity began to again reflect the desire to counterbalance the United States.

4 East Asian multipolarity: policy implications

For many of the Russian elite, East Asia was particularly receptive to their multipolarity views.⁵ As one Russian Asia expert opined, multipolarity was particularly effective in Asia since international relations in this region had been multipolar even during the Cold War and remained so in the post-Cold War world. Thus, Russia’s multipolarity policy was not a reactive one; it addressed the objective realities of international relations in Asia and the Asia-Pacific (Chufrin, 1999, p. 485). Indeed, the majority of analysts and Foreign Ministry officials interviewed by this author viewed East Asia as multipolar or becoming multipolar.⁶ Primakov himself maintained that a policy based on multipolarity would better reflect regional reality due to the existence and rise of economic powers in East Asia (‘Primakov: Foreign policy’, 1997). The current Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, similarly asserted that the process toward multipolarity is ‘vividly pronounced in the Asia-Pacific space’ (Lavrov, 2005).

4.1 *Preserving the status quo and pursuing balance*

While multipolarity at the global level, especially the Primakovian interpretation, was US-centric, multipolarity at the East Asian level was a more complex one. For the Russian elite, the existence of many other ‘power centers’ such as China, Japan, and ASEAN posed different challenges and opportunities for Russia’s attempt to regain regional influence. The unresolved historical animosities and territorial claims among

5 Whether Asia or East Asia is multipolar or not remains open to debate by Western scholars. While some have argued that Asia is multipolar (Friedberg, 1993–94, 2000), others have argued that the region is bipolar with the United States as a maritime power and China as a land power (Ross, 1999). Asian analysts, on the other hand, tend to view East Asia as multipolar (Seng, 2002; Mahbubani, 1995).

6 Author’s interviews of 25 analysts and Foreign Ministry officials in Moscow, October–November 2005.

these regional powers and the tension on the Korean peninsula served to characterize East Asian multipolarity as potentially fluid and conflict prone. This complicated Russia's strategic calculations, forcing it to pursue a more complex balance-of-power policy in the region (Torkunov, 1999, p. 341; Krupianko and Areshidze, 2002, p. 193). The United States was no longer the main referent point, but China also. Russia's policy was essentially to preserve the regional *status quo* while preventing any destabilizing processes. Moscow sought to pursue balanced relations with all regional states in order to avoid being overly dependent on one country, as a 2005 discussion among leading analysts and Asia experts concluded (Bordachev, 2006, p. 63). Similarly, the 2007 Survey of Russian Foreign Policy stated that Russia's 'strategic aim is to form in-depth and balanced relations with countries of the [Asia-Pacific] region, guaranteeing its long-term stability' ('Obzor Vneshnei', 2007). By pursuing such balanced relations, Russia also sought to regain influence in regional affairs. Although a relatively weak regional player, Russia still possessed assets that allow it to play a 'balancer' role in the region, being an 'honest intermediary' in, for instance, the Korean crisis, the China–Japan–United States strategic triangle, United States–Chinese relations, and ASEAN's response to China's rise (Lo, 2002b, pp. 42–43). Such a role was advocated by several Russian diplomats and policy analysts (Petrovskii, 1998, p. 193; Voskresenskii, 2001; Losiukov, 2002, p. 14; Boliatko, 2003, p. 42), though whether Russia can play such a role effectively is open to question.

Russia's regional 'balancer' role was variably welcomed by some ASEAN states, whom Moscow saw as one of the centers of the emerging multipolar world (see 'Statement by Evgenii Primakov', 1996; 'Russia's Putin', 2000). Both Russia and ASEAN had mutual interests in seeing the other involved in the regional balance of power, providing balance to their relations with other powers. For instance, ASEAN invited Russia, *inter alia*, to join the ARF to provide greater balance within the Forum (Emmers, 2001). However, the general enthusiasm with regards to Russia's regional role gradually waned as some ASEAN members grew skeptical of the extent of Russia's clout, especially its economic strength during the Yeltsin years. Singapore's former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, for example, predicted in 2000 that Russia will not be a major player in East Asia for at least another 20 years (Lee Kuan Yew, 2000). ASEAN, however, was further important for Russia as it had taken the

lead in Asia-Pacific regionalism. To ensure Russia's place in this process required ASEAN endorsement. However, the lack of substantive ties with ASEAN, especially in the economic sphere, prompted some ASEAN members, namely Singapore and Indonesia, to oppose Russian membership in the newly formed East Asian Summit, despite Russia being an ASEAN dialogue partner since 1996 and having acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 2004, as well as despite the support from other ASEAN members such as Malaysia and Thailand (Buszynski, 2006a). Nonetheless, Russia would likely become more important for ASEAN, if not for its current trade potential then for its increasing stature in international affairs. Indeed, ASEAN itself has been adopting an 'omni-enmeshment strategy' of engaging all the major powers, including Russia, to avoid the predominance of a single power in the region (Goh, 2005).

4.2 The role of Japan and the United States in East Asia

While Moscow often criticized the United States' international role as acts of unilateralism, the United States was reluctantly acknowledged by some in Moscow as a stabilizing force in East Asia – restraining a militarizing Japan, preserving the *status quo* on the Korean peninsula, and balancing a rising China. Indeed, compared with Russian views of NATO, the elite's perceptions of the US system of alliances with Japan and South Korea were relatively positive, especially during the 1990s (Kuchins and Zagorskii, 1999). Since Yeltsin visited Tokyo and Seoul in November 1993, Moscow formally praised the US system of alliances as positive guarantees of regional security. For instance, in 1997, Defense Minister Igor Rodionov declared that Russia was not worried about the close security relations between the United States and Japan, recognizing it as a stabilizing factor in East Asia (cited in 'MID i Minoborony', 1997). In 2000, Putin similarly acknowledged that the presence of US troops on the Korean peninsula was a significant guarantee of Northeast Asian security (cited in 'Diplomatic Panorama', 2000). Despite this, some concerns were raised regarding the US system of alliances, especially in relation to Japan and the unresolved territorial dispute with Russia over the South Kurils or what the Japanese call the Northern Territories. These disputed islands consistently informed much of the hard-line perceptions of the US–Japanese alliance held by the military

and conservative policy analysts and legislators. They regarded superior US and Japanese military forces around the Sea of Okhotsk as a threat to Russia's ballistic missile carrying submarines (Meyer, 1994–95, p. 497) and argued that Russia should under no circumstances return the islands as they were Russia's key to the Asia-Pacific and essential for Russia's Pacific Fleet (Klimenko, 2002, p. 70). The strengthening of the US–Japanese defense cooperation and Japan's increased military role from potential constitutional amendment were causes for further concern, especially under Putin (Boliatko, 2003, pp. 50–52; Agafonov *et al.*, 2005, pp. 52–55; Narochnitskaia, 2005, p. 180). Moscow also resented being excluded from any regional security structure, including the US system of alliances, which constituted the more negative official views. For instance, Primakov called the alliance system an 'anachronism' of the Cold War ('Opening Statement', 1997) while official Russian contributions to the *ARF Annual Security Outlook* (2004, p. 61; 2005, p. 85) criticized the US alliance system of creating new divisions in the region and potentially inflaming latent conflicts. Indeed, Russian diplomats saw the strengthening of the US–Japanese alliance, for instance, the 2005 US–Japanese Joint Declaration, as unconstructively provoking China to accelerate its military development to Russia's strategic disadvantage.⁷

This fear of the destabilization of the fragile regional balance of power further fuelled Russian negative perceptions of US–Japanese plans to develop a Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) system. Moscow was particularly apprehensive of the Chinese reaction, fearing a massive Chinese military and nuclear capabilities build-up that could threaten Russia's Far Eastern regions and undermine Russia's attempts to regain its economic and political influence and presence in the region. Indeed, such a build-up might allow Beijing to reach strategic parity with Moscow within the next 10–15 years (Trenin, 2001, p. 143; Shlyndov, 2005, pp. 137–139; Pikaev, 2001). Moscow, however, did not officially voice these concerns, making known instead the view that US TMD plans might jeopardize regional stability. For instance, Foreign Minister Lavrov criticized the US missile defense plans as spurring an arms race regionally and globally ('Russia concerned', 2007). Moscow was further

7 Author's interviews with Russian diplomats, Tokyo and Moscow, March and November 2005.

concerned with the ‘closed nature’ of TMD. Indeed, Russian diplomats disapproved the fact that Russia was excluded from these US-led regional security developments, reinforcing Moscow’s belief that the US intentionally ignores and marginalizes Russia in international affairs.⁸ At the global level, Moscow was more concerned with the loss of strategic parity with the United States. The US missile defense plans were thus seen by proponents of a multipolar world, like Primakov (2004, p. 100), as further evidence of the US attempts to maintain its dominant position. Moscow also did not see the US TMD plans as justified. First Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov dismissed the North Korean missile threat to the US as ‘ridiculous’ (‘Transcript of Interview’, 2007).

While the disputed territories and Japanese military development and alliance with the US often clouded Russian perceptions of Japan, Japan *per se* was seen by some of the Russian elite as a more favorable partner than China. Indeed, latent fears of a rising China right on Russia’s doorstep has long prompted some in Moscow to seek better ties with Tokyo.⁹ Putin’s decision to build an oil pipeline through Eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East (RFE) to the Pacific Ocean, as opposed to Daqing in China, was based as much on fears of overdependence on the Chinese market as on the need to spur the development of Russia’s eastern regions. Moscow foresaw that Russia would be dependent on China as the single buyer if it proceeded with the China route. Given Moscow’s experience with Turkey exploiting its position as monopoly buyer in the Blue Stream gas pipeline, the Kremlin was reluctant to make the same mistake. It was also hoped that Japan would become more amenable to making concessions on the territorial issue and provide much-needed finance were the Pacific route chosen, though this did not bear fruit. Indeed, Japan remained intransigent regarding the Kurils as it felt it had a strong bargaining position ensured by its belief that Russia would need

8 Author’s interviews with Foreign Ministry officials, Moscow, November 2005.

9 This was especially so during the early 1990s when Westernizers such as Andrei Kozyrev and Georgii Kunadze controlled the Foreign Ministry and saw Japan as representative of the ‘West in Asia’ (Rozman *et al.*, 2006, pp. 10–11). Liberal politicians like Vladimir Lukin likewise urged for a ‘historic compromise’ on the territorial issue to improve relations with Japan to balance China (‘A Transformed Russia’, 1992, p. 92). The Foreign Ministry then was considering reviving Khrushchev’s 1956 proposal of returning the two smaller islands but strong criticism from military officers and nationalist–conservative politicians against such a compromise and Japan’s intransigent stance pressured Yeltsin to cancel his planned September 1992 visit to Japan (Kuhrt, 2007, pp. 67–79).

massive Japanese funding to finance the Pacific route (Buszynski, 2006b, p. 299). Even Putin's compromise proposal in late 2004 to return back the two smaller islands was rebuffed by Japan. This made it difficult for Moscow to rule on the pipeline route in favor of Japan. Tokyo itself was also driven by geopolitical motivations, rather than economic, to strategically deny China diversification of its energy supply and a strengthened relationship with Russia (Chow, 2004, pp. 30–31). As one Japanese diplomat candidly admitted, Tokyo was interested in strengthening relations with Russia, among others, to balance China.¹⁰ Tokyo was also playing on Russia's insecurities in its RFE *vis-à-vis* China, as testified by Koizumi's January 2003 visit to Khabarovsk to lobby for support for the Pacific route. The RFE elite themselves were supportive of this route. Khabarovskii and Primorskii *krais* had long urged for greater economic cooperation with Japan to keep in check Chinese influence in the RFE. Khabarovsk Governor Viktor Ishaev declared support for the Pacific route, with a possible branch to China, since the China route alone would create the danger of 'dictatorship of the exclusive buyer' ('The Khabarovsk Governor', 2003). Both regions also supported the Pacific route for the obvious economic benefits its construction would bring to their territories – employment, funds for regional budgets, and development of regional infrastructure (Trenin and Mikheev, 2005, p. 10).

The pipeline was to be constructed in two phases: first, construction of the Taishet–Skovorodino oil pipeline with annual capacity of 30 million tons and of the oil terminal in Perevoznaya Bay both to be completed by late 2008, but later changed to late 2009 and the terminus was also changed to Kozmino in February 2008 on environmental grounds; secondly, construction of the Skovorodino–Perevoznaya Bay (later changed to Kozmino) oil pipeline with annual capacity of 50 million tons to link up with the Taishet–Skovorodino pipeline with total annual capacity of 80 million tons ('Directive No. 91', 2005). This second phase would be in conjunction with the development of oil fields in Eastern Russia and was expected to start construction in December 2009, after President Medvedev criticized the delays ('Russian President D. Medvedev', 2008). Meanwhile, Russia would supply China with oil by rail but the option of building a spur pipeline to Daqing was kept

10 Remarks at Conference on Japanese Foreign Policy, 21 April 2004, St Antony's College, Oxford (author attended).

opened. In November 2007, Russia and China agreed to construct this spur with China providing the funding, and it was expected to be completed and put into operation by the end of 2008 (later changed to 2009). However, Russia demanded further negotiations on the oil price that China is willing to pay first (Blagov, 2008a; Skosyrev, 2008). In late October 2008, an agreement on pricing was reportedly reached with a 15-year oil supply deal expected to be signed in a month's time between Russia's Rosneft and China's CNPC ('Rosneft', 2008). With regards to Japan, no breakthrough regarding the territorial issue was achieved during Japanese Prime Minister Fukuda's April 2008 visit to Moscow and during President Medvedev's visit to Hokkaido for the G8 Summit in July 2008. Moreover, Tokyo has reportedly appeared reluctant to commit funding for the Pacific route. With the conclusion of a peace treaty with Japan proving to be persistently elusive and the lack of Japanese investment pledges, it appeared that Moscow gave priority to the branch pipeline to China for now, though further changes cannot be ruled out (Blagov, 2008b). Moreover, whether there is enough Russian oil to supply both the China and Pacific routes remained uncertain. In light of the 'Japanese option' for balancing Russia's East Asian relations remaining limited along with the prospects of improving Sino-Japanese relations in the wake of President Hu Jintao's Japan visit in May 2008, the first such presidential visit in a decade, Russia apparently had to reconcile itself with learning to live with China's rise, despite Russia's ambivalent attitude toward its eastern neighbor.

4.3 Engaging the dragon

Arguably no other East Asian development concerned and preoccupied Russia's elite more than China's rising power. The stark contrast between Russia's relative weakness and China's unrelenting economic growth, military modernization, and political confidence informed much of the Russian elite's diverse perceptions of China and policy toward it. Russia's China policy throughout the 1990s was essentially an extension of Gorbachev's policy of creating a stable external environment conducive for domestic reforms. In this light, normalization of relations with China was deemed a priority. Russo-Chinese relations were also based on shared concerns regarding US unilateralism and preference for a multipolar world. Moreover, given Russia's dwindling influence, Moscow also saw relations

with Beijing 'as a force-multiplier for Russian interests in international affairs' (Merry, 2003, p. 21). But an increasingly confident Russia under Putin has sought to pursue a more balanced policy, forging Russia's own place in East Asia. Optimistic prospects for economic cooperation also drove the relationship with China, though it was more specific interests like military-technological cooperation (MTC) and energy cooperation that constituted much of the economic agenda. While officially Russian relations with China appear to be close, Russian perceptions of China are ambivalent at best. Concerns were often raised over the prospects of arming a potential threat through MTC, and of a Chinese demographic threat or creeping economic expansion into the RFE.

With China as one of Russia's largest arms customers, MTC with China undoubtedly had economic benefits for Russia, propping up the ailing defense industry and fuelling much-needed research and development of new weapons systems. As then Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov stated, 'Russia's defence industry can be preserved only by supplying military equipment and arms to China' (cited in Lague and Lawrence, 2002). But due to vested corruption, the economic gains from arms exports should not be overestimated (Sergounin and Subbotin, 1999, pp. 66–67). Moreover, arms sales often functioned as surrogates for much-needed defense-sector reform (Blank, 2003, p. 584). A more recent problem is that the Chinese market has become saturated – no major arms deals were signed during the Chinese President's visit to Moscow in March 2007. According to the SIPRI, there was a 63% drop in Russian arms deliveries to China in 2007 (Holtom, 2008). China now has a sufficient amount of Russian military equipment to absorb and is more interested in advanced technology and joint production. But while Moscow is concerned with losing the Chinese market, there is no consensus among military officials on what can be sold to China, with many Russian security officials fearing that this would impair Russia's defense capability in the RFE (Petrov, 2007; Litovkin, 2008). Such fears were ingrained in the thinking of many of the political and military elite. They opposed arms transfers for a number of reasons: arming a future threat; Chinese re-exporting cheaper Chinese versions of Russian weapons systems thereby undercutting Russia in the global arms market; and resentment that Russia was arming China with equipment that even the Russian military did not possess. The prevailing official view, however, was that China did not pose a military threat, trade was

profitable, and that the kind of arms China was buying was geared toward military actions in the South, toward Taiwan and the South China Sea, rather than toward Russia (Rangsimaporn, 2006b). Then Defence Minister Ivanov re-emphasized the official position that Russia did not face a Chinese military threat and was not conducting MTC to its own strategic detriment (Cherniak, 2002).

There were also other Russian concerns, in particular, the threat of Chinese demographic expansion from a large influx of immigrants, illegal and legal, into the sparsely populated RFE. This fear was especially prevalent among RFE politicians during Sino-Russian border demarcation negotiations in the 1990s and was connected to fears of the Chinese claiming back historically disputed territories (Lukin, 1998, 2003, pp. 166–177). For instance, Khabarovsk Governor Ishaev claimed that Beijing had a well-defined program to settle its surplus population in the RFE and intended to flood the region with their ‘shoddy goods’ and to siphon valuable natural resources out of the region (Blagov, 1999). While the official position emanating from figures such as Putin’s foreign policy advisor Sergei Prikhodko (2004) was to deny such threats, the glaring underdevelopment and growing vulnerability of the RFE prompted even Putin to remark that ‘the very existence of this region [RFE] for Russia is questionable. If we don’t take concrete efforts, the future local population will speak Japanese, Chinese or Korean’ (RFE/RL Reports, 2000). Some military and intelligence officers have also, to various degrees, warned against a Chinese threat, militarily, demographically, and through its economic expansion into the RFE to capture natural resources (Sharavin, 2001; Ostankov, 2005; Deviatov, 2004; Gareev, 2008). Indeed, China’s moves into Russia’s energy sector were viewed with apprehension and suspicion. In December 2002, Russia’s State Duma blocked a Chinese oil company’s (CNPC) bid for 75% of a Russian energy company’s (Slavneft) stocks. However, given the need for foreign investment, Russian companies like Rosneft have welcomed China into Russia’s energy sector, albeit on Russian terms. Chinese banks provided US\$6 billion for Rosneft to acquire Yuganskneftegaz, former Yukos company’s major oil subsidiary, in 2004 to be repaid by future oil deliveries to China. In 2006, China’s CNPC and Rosneft established a joint venture called Vostok Energy to explore Russian energy deposits with Rosneft holding the majority stake of 51% (Poussenkova, 2007, p. 40). A consortium of Chinese engineering firms was also

granted a tender in May 2008 to build two 660 megawatt-hours coal-powered turbines by 2012, part of Putin's 5-year expansion plan to electrify Russia (Shuster and Cowhig, 2008).

Russia's official position on China has been a relatively balanced one – engaging China when it suits Russia's interests but to avoid overdependence and unnecessary detrimental commitments such as a military alliance. Foreign Ministry officials emphasized that the Russo-Chinese strategic partnership is one based on equality, mutual trust and respect, and common interests, and is not directed at a third country (Losiukov, 2001; Rogachev, 2001; Vnukov, 2004). As then First Deputy Chief of Staff Iurii Baluevskii opined, Moscow's best China policy was to befriend and engage Beijing constructively (*RFE/RL Security*, 2002). Nonetheless, criticisms did arise from some non-official quarters. Some liberal politicians criticized Putin's China policy as 'capitulatory' and Putin of being a 'Chinese agent of influence' given his territorial concessions and aid to China's military buildup (Nemtsov and Milov, 2008). Such views, however, were rarely publicly aired among official circles. A concern more accepted by Russian officials was that, as Yu Bin (2007a) noted, Russo-Chinese relations were akin to a 'marriage without passion'. While official ties appear close, people-to-people relations are lukewarm at best, as Russian ongoing fears of Chinese migrants illustrates. Realizing this, Moscow and Beijing launched a Year of Russia in China and of China in Russia in 2006 and 2007, respectively, to nurture better mutual respect and understanding between the two peoples (Ferdinand, 2007, p. 850). One area for real potential contention, however, is Central Asia where both Russia and China vie for influence. Although Moscow generally considered Russo-Chinese rivalry in the region as secondary to the immediate mutual concern over the US role, there were certain reservations regarding Chinese influence in an area Russia regards as its traditional sphere of influence.¹¹ There were also disagreements concerning the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Central Asia's key regional grouping, which was formed in 2001, from confidence-and-security-building measures between China, Russia, and Central Asian states, ostensibly to combat terrorism, separatism, and extremism. Moscow would like to expand SCO's military and security

11 Author's interviews with Russian Foreign Ministry officials and policy analysts, October–November 2005.

functions because of its stronger military presence in Central Asia, while Beijing preferred to explore the SCO's economic and non-security-related potential, areas in which China potentially wields more influence (Yu Bin, 2007b, pp. 71–72; Maslov, 2007; Assanbayev, 2007, pp. 14–15). Given such diverse interests, the potential for disagreements exist if not outright hostilities.

As mentioned already, Putin has tried to maintain balance in its East Asia policy, reducing its Sino-centrism and seeking closer relations with Japan and ASEAN and also with India in wider Asia but with limited success. This attempt at 'strategic diversity' (Lo, 2004, p. 302) informed much of Putin's support for a Russian–Chinese–Indian strategic triangle. Unlike Primakov's earlier 1998 version that focused on countering US power, Putin's strategic triangle aimed at balancing Russian relations with both China and India, and of enmeshing China in a new multilateral entity. At the same time, it would also strengthen Russia's hand *vis-à-vis* the United States. But recent meetings have shown the limits of such cooperation and the divergent interests of the three parties (Bhadrakumar, 2007). Russia, wary of selling advanced weaponry to China, does not feel the same qualms toward India. For instance, Russia sold India the more advanced Su-30MKI than that sold to China. In 2007, Russia and India also signed a deal to jointly develop a fifth-generation multirole fighter. There is no such equivalent level of cooperation with China. India itself is moving closer to the United States and is interested in a potential quadrangular strategic dialogue with the United States, Japan, and Australia, though the latter has appeared less interested under Prime Minister Rudd. Unresolved border tensions between China and India potentially complicate the issue further (Iwashita, 2007). Russia's attempt under Putin to normalize relations with Japan has also failed with Tokyo insisting on the return of all four islands instead of two as proposed by Russia in 2004. Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso's musings in 2006 that a 50:50 division of the territories is one way to resolve the problem was subsequently denied as being Japan's official position and it was claimed that Aso's statement was misinterpreted (Blinov, 2006). Russia–ASEAN relations also remained restricted by the low level of economic ties and some skepticism, especially from Singapore, regarding Russia's regional role. It appears that despite Putin's attempt to pursue a more balanced policy, China is and will remain Russia's main focus in East Asia, including under President Medvedev. Indeed, a protocol was signed during Foreign

Minister Lavrov's visit to Beijing in July 2008, which finalized Sino-Russian border demarcations, ending their decades-long territorial dispute. It also ensured the stability of each country's 'strategic rear' so that each can focus on internal development and the more immediate concern regarding US unilateralism, especially, so for Russia given the US support for NATO's eastward expansion and installation of missile defense systems in the Czech Republic and Poland. Thus, despite Moscow's ambivalent attitude, the Kremlin understands that Russia's current interests are best served from engaging China, cooperating on areas of mutual interest, and trying to remove sources of tension.

5 Russia and regional security structures in East Asia

Russia has a strong interest in securing a stable East Asian environment to pursue its internal reforms, especially the development of its eastern regions. Moscow would like to avoid any sudden shifts in the strategic environment that may adversely affect Russian interests. In this respect, Moscow views the existing multilateral regional security structures like the ARF and APEC favorably. As aforementioned, the US system of alliances is also grudgingly viewed positively as a source of stability, though Moscow feels resentment at being excluded, seeing this as potentially undermining regional security and an affront to Russia's great-power sensibilities. As one senior Russian Foreign Ministry official maintained, the role of bilateral military alliances should be supportive to multilateral institutions, and not *vice versa*.¹² Moscow also views regional multilateral structures in realist terms often interpreting multilateralism in a way that reinforces Russia's multipolarity view. Moreover, Moscow supports the creation of a Northeast Asian security structure akin to a Concert of Powers based on the six-party talks on North Korea. Moscow views such a structure as complementing the existing regional structures and most consonant with their views of regional multipolarity and self-perceived great-power status.

12 Author's interview, Moscow, November 2005.

5.1 *Multipolarity and multilateralism*

How Moscow interpreted multipolarity and multilateralism is particularly indicative of the elite's perceptions of regional security structures. While multilateralism implies the democratization of international affairs to a system in which all nation-states would have a voice, multipolarity was 'plutocratic to the core' (Lo, 2002a, p. 92). In other words, while multilateralism implied an inclusive approach to regional security, multipolarity held more exclusive connotations – only a few significant powers can be deemed a 'pole'. Despite this distinction, Moscow tended to understand both concepts in ways that would help affirm or promote its great-power status. Thus, Moscow often viewed multilateral institutions through a multipolar prism, as an arena for great-power dialogue and an instrument to further Russia's interests. Russia's relationship with multilateral organizations was 'inherently hypocritical' as it wanted to use these institutions to further its own interests but 'refused to allow them to restrict Russia's freedom of action' (Ambrosio, p. 101). At the same time, Russia promoted multipolarity as a 'democratization' of international affairs. For example, Yeltsin proclaimed that Russia and China stood for building a 'multipolar world' as this was the 'most democratic model of the world system', in which nobody would have claims on exclusive rights ('Text of Yeltsin', 1997). While praising the growth of multilateral structures in Asia, Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov maintained that this would lead to the creation of an Asia-Pacific security infrastructure based on the 'principles of multipolarity and equality' (Ivanov, 2004). While multipolarity might entail a relatively more democratic world than bipolarity or unipolarity would, it remains inherently exclusive and essentially undemocratic – smaller countries could not have as much say as powerful ones.¹³ Similarly, Russian participation of multilateral institutions like the ARF and APEC was primarily based on the prestige value from being accepted as a legitimate player in East Asian affairs while Russian belief in the efficacy of multilateralism was secondary. For instance, then Foreign Minister Kozyrev noted upon Russian membership of the ARF that Russia had succeeded in winning a place 'worthy of a great power' (*ITAR-TASS*, 1994). Russia's decision to seek entry into APEC was similarly a political one, based on considerations

13 See Foreign Minister Lavrov's views in which he stresses the democratization of international affairs based on broad accord between the main global actors (Lavrov, 2004).

of prestige (Shkuropat, 1999, p. 4). The November 2000 Concept of Russia's Participation in APEC approved by Putin emphasized the fact that 'Russia as a Eurasian power' strived to execute its 'Eurasian mission' to develop balanced international cooperation in Europe and Asia under 'new conditions of market development and a multipolar world' ('Kontsepsiia Uchastiia', 2000). In this light, the refusal to grant Russian membership to the East Asian Summit dealt a blow to Russian ambitions, which was partially assuaged by inviting Putin to give a speech at the inaugural summit in December 2005.

Russia also often used these multilateral institutions instrumentally to advance its multipolar vision and counterbalance US unilateralism. For instance, Primakov frequently promoted a 'multipolar world order' during ARF sessions, seeking support from other members. At the May 1997 ARF Senior Officials' Meeting, the Russian and Chinese delegations circulated their April 1997 Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World as an official document, noting that it was fully in line with the principles of cooperation within the ARF. At the July 1997 meeting, Primakov made a thinly-veiled criticism of the US bilateral alliance system ('Opening Statement', 1997). Foreign Minister Ivanov continued to use the Forum to criticize the US policies and gather support for Russia's multipolar vision ('Opening Statement', 2000 and 2001). However, Foreign Minister Lavrov's statements were more toned down ('Summary of Statement', 2007). To be fair, Russia has also sometimes acted constructively when it suits its interests (Sergounin, 2000). For instance, Russia initiated the development of a Code of Conduct for Inter-State Relations in the Asia-Pacific (Pacific Concord) since 1995 as it sees the maintenance of regional security a priority. A revised version formulated with ASEAN states was signed as a Russian-ASEAN joint declaration in June 2003 ('Sovmestnaia Deklaratsiia', 2003). Russia also acceded to ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, which acted as a regional code of conduct, and was signed by ASEAN states in Bali 1976, making Russia the second nuclear power and permanent member of the UN Security Council after China to do so ('Instrument of Accession', 2004).

At the same time, Moscow often pushed its regional security agenda in the form of the SCO, which was often heralded by Moscow as a successful model for Asian and Asia-Pacific security ('Opening Statement', 2001; Klimenko, 2003; Ivanov, 2004). This attempt to use the SCO to link parts of a region that Russia perceives to be its traditional sphere of

influence – the Near Abroad – with a region in which Russia’s influence is relatively marginal is indicative of Moscow’s aspirations to remain relevant for East Asian security. Moscow champions the SCO, an organization in which it holds some authority, to compensate, in part, for its relative lack of influence in East Asian security structures, though China is increasingly gaining ground within Central Asia and the SCO itself (Rumer, 2002; Ong, 2005). Russia thus officially supports a wide range of regional security structures, multilateral and bilateral, the latter especially that with China (Rogachev, 2005, pp. 93–96; Zhirnov, 2002, pp. 205–240), so long as there is Russian participation. For Moscow, no one security arrangement or institution alone is sufficient for maintaining regional security. All are varyingly important and mutually complementing mechanisms (Petrovskii, 1997).

5.2 *A Concert of Powers and the Korean talks*

With the absence of a security mechanism for Northeast Asia, a sub-region fraught with tension, Moscow believes that such a sub-regional security arrangement is necessary. Russian policymakers and analysts see a Concert of Powers as an approach that best corresponds not only with the realities of Northeast Asia where several powers have a stake in its stability, but also with Russian views of multipolarity and its self-perception of being a great power with a legitimate role in East Asian affairs.¹⁴ The Concert would not be a permanent institutionalized structure but rather a mechanism for cooperation and consultation between the major East Asian powers on major issues of concern to regulate the regional balance of power and preserve the strategic *status quo*. Not only would Russian participation benefit Russia’s self-perception of being a great power and secure its role in East Asian affairs, it would also help constrain not only US power and its penchant for unilateralism but also that of other aspiring powers (Lo, 2005, p. 23). Furthermore, the unwieldy nature of existing multilateral institutions like the ARF prompted the belief that a more manageable structure such as a Concert of Powers could be applied to Northeast Asia where the primary interests of the major powers meet. Thus, given Russia’s relatively weak position, an East Asian Concert was seen as having the potential to satisfy

14 The idea of a Concert of Powers in East Asia or broader Asia is neither new nor exclusive to Russian thinking (Shirk, 1997; Acharya, 1999; Ayson, 2007).

Russia's great-power aspirations better than the alternatives of a US (or Chinese)-led regional security system, or an inclusive multilateral system like the ARF, in which power becomes so diffused among the many participants that it is perhaps rendered virtually meaningless.

A diverse range of foreign policy actors supported such a non-institutionalized Concert approach to managing regional security based primarily on the view that it is the major powers that determine East Asia's fate. Then Foreign Minister Primakov maintained that Russia, Japan, China, and the United States were the primary countries on which Asia-Pacific stability and security depended (*ITAR-TASS*, 1998). Then Defence Minister Rodionov also advocated the creation of a 'quadrangular system' consisting of the four regional powers that would complement the existing bilateral alliances if not replace them (*Interfax*, 1997). His successor, Igor Sergeev, similarly emphasized the importance of consultations on Asia-Pacific problems between the four powers based on both bilateral and multilateral cooperation ('Defence Minister Sergeev', 1998). Several senior Foreign Ministry officials similarly advocate such a Concert system for East Asia or Northeast Asia (Moiseev, 1997, p. 32; Ivanov, 1998, pp. 192–193; Fedotov, 2002, p. 119; and author's interviews, Moscow, November 2005).

As with the nineteenth-century European Concert of Powers, an international crisis was the main stimulant for a concerted effort to manage security on a consultative basis between the key players who shared a common interest in resolving the issue. The Korean nuclear crisis met this criterion, whereby the major East Asian powers shared interest in a peaceful resolution. Moscow thus perceived this as an opportunity to reassert its regional role and to promote its Concert idea. As one Russian Foreign Ministry expert on Korea noted regarding the six-party talks, 'an institutionalisation of the Northeast Asia security and cooperation mechanism . . . might play an important role in a changeover from contentions based on mutual deterrence to a system of cooperation/competition grounded in the balance of interests, i.e. in a "concert of power"' (Toloraia, 2008, p. 183). Another senior Russian diplomat proposed that an East Asian Concert could become a forum for exchanging opinions on the nuclear crisis, supplementing the existing talks. The Concert would be a 'concept' for regulating relations between the major powers through cooperation, consultations, and information-sharing rather than a permanent institutionalized structure (Ivanov,

1998, pp. 192–194). Such a Concert would stabilize multipolar great-power relations, within which Russia would benefit from a fluid balance of power (Rozman, 2006, p. 238).

Since Russian advocacy of a Concert arrangement was preconditioned on its participation, this experienced a major stumbling block at the inception of the Korean negotiations when it was excluded from both the US-negotiated Agreed Framework of October 1994 and the subsequent Agreement on the Establishment of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation (KEDO), signed in March 1995 by the United States, South Korea, and Japan. Russia's exclusion stemmed mainly from its loss of former influence with Pyongyang since it had disengaged itself from Pyongyang in favor of Seoul in the early 1990s. As a result, Russia became marginalized from Korean affairs (Takeda, 2006, pp. 191–192). While Moscow had long proposed multilateral talks on North Korea with Russian participation in various formats since March 1994, these proposals were mostly ignored by many of the countries concerned (Harada, 1997, pp. 62–65). According to Russian Korea experts, Beijing was also less keen on relinquishing its 'more solid' position in the inter-Korean dialogue, tending to respond 'coldly' to Moscow's proposals for a wider international conference, despite their strategic partnership (Li, 2000, pp. 275–281). Recognizing its loss of influence, Moscow revised its Korea policy in an attempt to reassert itself by conducting a more balanced policy toward the Koreas and supporting inter-Korean dialogue (Moiseev, 1996, p. 106). Russia supported South Korea's 'Sunshine Policy' in May 1999 and hope for a chance to play a larger part in the negotiations.

Under Putin, Russia stepped up its relations with Pyongyang in a bid to increase its influence on the peninsula: Putin became the first Kremlin leader to visit North Korea in July 2000. The Putin administration also supported the reconnection of railway lines between North and South Korea, and proposed to link the eastern Trans-Korean line with Russia's Trans-Siberian line in a bid to not only increase Russia's influence on the peninsula and facilitate inter-Korean dialogue, but also to reap the associated commercial gains from this 'transport corridor' through Russia and the economic development of the RFE (Putin, 2000). The peaceful resolution of the Korean crisis held another important dimension for Russia. Moscow hoped to influence Pyongyang to cease its nuclear program, thereby removing any US justification for building missile defense systems ('Written Interview', 2000). In an attempt to gain influence, Putin sent

seasoned diplomat Aleksandr Losiukov to Pyongyang in January 2003 with a 'package solution' that called for achieving non-nuclear status for the peninsula, strict observance of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and the fulfillment of other international obligations including the 1994 Framework Agreement, in return for security guarantees for Pyongyang (*Diplomaticheskii*, 2003). However, Moscow could not achieve much since Pyongyang wanted security guarantees from Washington directly.

Moscow's policy of engaging Pyongyang and persistent calls to be included in the talks did finally pay off when in August 2003 Pyongyang insisted Moscow be brought into any US-proposed multilateral talks. As Korea expert Aleksandr Vorontsov noted, Pyongyang was afraid that without Russia they would be faced with an anti-Pyongyang coalition ('Russia, friendly face', 2003). Although Moscow achieved its participation in what was akin to a Concert-of-Powers consultation on North Korea, there was no breakthrough in the talks until February 2007 when Pyongyang agreed to shut down its Yongbyon reactor in exchange for fuel aid and the US compromise of agreeing to work toward normalizing relations and of providing economic aid. The reactor was closed in July 2007 and Pyongyang produced a declaration of its nuclear program in June 2008, although this still omitted the extent of its nuclear proliferation activities worldwide and its efforts to enrich uranium. In August 2008, Pyongyang declared the suspension of its denuclearization process and announced its consideration of restoring the Yongbyon facilities in response to the delay in removing North Korea from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism. In October 2008, the US removed North Korea from the said list after North Korea agreed to verification of its nuclear program, much to Japan's chagrin that wanted Pyongyang to make progress on the abduction issue first. Japan's insistence on resolving the abduction issue and South Korea's election in December 2007 of a President with a more hard-line policy on North Korea than his predecessor, which threatens to lead to a 'cooling' of inter-Korean relations,¹⁵

15 While the 'Sunshine Policy' of the previous two South Korean presidential administrations was not fully effective and had its critics, it did lead to a warming of relations between the two Koreas, including the holding of the first inter-Korean summit in 2000 with a second one in 2007. Nonetheless, it appears very unlikely that President Lee Myung Bak would renege on all the agreements concluded by his predecessor during the second inter-Korean summit and that inter-Korean hostilities would flare up (Zhebin and Yong Ung, 2008, p. 39).

mean that tension on the Korean peninsula is far from being completely removed. Nevertheless, a breakthrough has been achieved and this very much hinged on Washington's willingness to make concessions and engage with Pyongyang. Moscow's role in this was marginal. Despite this fact, Moscow continues to perceive Russia's interests as best served by securing a place at the talks. Russia considers itself entitled to a seat at the table since it has legitimate and immediate security interests in preventing an outbreak of nuclear war that would seriously threaten its Far Eastern regions, an interest in reaping economic gains from cooperation and integration with both Koreas, and a sense of historical mission and interest in the affairs on the peninsula, dating back to Tsarist times. Continued participation in the Korean negotiations would also satisfy Russia's aspirations to play an important role in East Asian affairs as befits its self-perceived great-power status.

6 Conclusion

Russia, since the latter half of the 1990s, has stepped up its diplomacy, trying to reassert itself as a great power through the use of its political and, increasingly so under Putin, economic assets such as arms and energy. Russian advocacy for a multipolar world was essentially informed by this great-power aspiration and the related goal of counterbalancing US unilateralism. However, the complex and fluid nature of a multipolar East Asia meant that Russia could not solely aim at restraining the US power in this region, but had to respond also to the regional challenges and opportunities posed to Russia's great-power aspirations. A multipolar East Asia characterized by persistent historical animosities and territorial disputes between the regional powers and lacking a viable regional security structure has laid the region open to potential conflicts and instability. Russia's deteriorating conventional military forces and vulnerable Far Eastern territories have meant that Moscow had to focus its initial diplomatic efforts to preserve, at the very least, the fragile regional *status quo*. Russia has tried to strike a delicate balance in its relations with other regional powers, avoiding overdependence on one power while trying to enhance its own interests and influence in the region, and globally *vis-à-vis* the United States. But this has met with limited success. While Russia aspires to be a great power in the region, it has to avoid upsetting the *status quo* in its rise to power, and has also had to respond to a rising

China and a potentially more assertive and independent Japan, encouraged and supported by the United States. Amidst such changes, the lack of a viable regional security structure has prompted Moscow to call for more effective mechanisms for preserving regional security. While the importance of existing multilateral institutions was acknowledged, Moscow espoused a Concert approach to managing regional security, especially in Northeast Asia. Moscow saw the six-party negotiations on North Korea's nuclear development program as the most probable template for this regional Concert. Not only would Russia's participation in the Concert underline its great-power claims, but it would also correspond to what many of the Russian elite see as the realities of a multipolar East Asia and their desire for a multipolar world that would serve to restrain the excessiveness of the US power. Thus, while Russia's great-power aspirations were clear and became increasingly focused under Putin, the potentially volatile nature of a multipolar East Asia complicated this aim. Russia had to reconcile its desire to counterbalance US unilateralism and concerns over the strengthening of the US–Japanese alliance with its grudging acceptance of the US's regional stabilizing role. Russia had to engage with a rising China, partly to counterbalance the US threat globally, but amidst fears and concerns of a Chinese threat. Russian flexibility in the regional balance of power was also undermined by its failure to normalize relations with Japan and to establish substantial economic ties with ASEAN. Russia continued to insist on its participation in the six-party talks and in regional multilateral organizations despite its limited influence, which has been superseded by China and the United States. All these factors served to underline the somewhat vague and contradictory nature of Russian perceptions and policies of multipolarity in East Asia, thereby undermining the means to fully realize Russia's great-power aspirations.

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