

Transformation of Post-Soviet Russia's Interests in the Asia-Pacific Region

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Abstract. The relevance of this study is due to the significant transformation of the system of international relations caused by the geopolitical transit from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. In the context of modern global changes and dynamic processes in the international arena, the study of the transformation of Russia's interests in the Asia-Pacific region (APR) is becoming especially important. It provides an opportunity to predict future trends in international relations and develop specific recommendations for the development of Russia's foreign policy strategy. In the context of worsening relations with the West and Russia's turn to the East, this study allows us to better understand key trends in the region and develop strategic solutions to strengthen Russia's geopolitical status in the Asia-Pacific region. In particular, it is important to take into account the economic, political and military aspects of Russia's presence in this dynamically developing region. Thus, this study plays a key role in shaping Russia's long-term foreign policy strategy and its adaptation to new geopolitical realities, not only in order to strengthen its position in the Asia-Pacific region, but also to respond more effectively to the challenges and opportunities arising from the transformation of the global system of international relations.

Keywords: Asia-Pacific Region, geopolitical status, geopolitical priorities, geopolitical shift, Russia, China, infrastructure projects, network alliances

For citation: Konovalov I.A. Transformation of Post-Soviet Russia's Interests in the Asia-Pacific Region. Russia & World: Scientific Dialogue. 2024; 3(13): 34-46, [doi.org/10.53658/RW2024-4-3\(13\)-34-46](https://doi.org/10.53658/RW2024-4-3(13)-34-46)

Introduction

Modern Russia is actively rethinking its foreign policy strategy, especially its relations with the Asia-Pacific region. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the country has faced new challenges and opportunities, which requires a reassessment of priorities and strategic goals.

The study of this transformation has changed over two periods: Belovezhskaya (1991–2014) and Crimean (2014 to the present). The division into these periods is justified by changes in Russia's domestic and foreign policy, in the geopolitical situation.

These are key stages in the evolution of the foreign policy interests of post-Soviet Russia, reflecting changes in its geopolitical status. During the Belovezhskaya period, Russia sought to integrate into the international community and search for new economic ties; during the Crimean period, the emphasis shifted to strengthening national security and searching for strategic partners in Asia. The division presented in the article allows us to study the influence of a combination of internal and external factors, regional conflicts and economic transformations on Russia's geopolitical strategy, the transformation of its interests in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as the dynamics of its foreign policy evolution.

The geopolitical transformation of post-Soviet Russia is a complex and multifaceted process. Immediately after the signing of the Belovezh Accords in 1991, Russia faced the need to rethink its foreign policy due to a sharp change in its geopolitical status. In the 1990s, the priority of Russia's foreign policy strategy was the desire to integrate into international institutions and establish economic cooperation primarily with Western countries, which was due to the need to resolve internal contradictions that arose after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the need to reduce tensions with the once ideological enemy.

The turn to the East has become a strategically important step for Russia, especially after the events of 2014. In the face of sanctions pressure and political isolation from Western countries, Russia began to more actively develop relations with the states of the Asia-Pacific region. The region has become a key area of foreign economic and foreign policy activities of Russia, which is due to its growing geopolitical status. The scientific novelty of this study lies in the comprehensive analysis of the transformation of Russia's interests in the Asia-Pacific region in the context of changing geopolitical conditions. Additionally, the evolution of Russia's interaction with key countries of the Asia-Pacific region in the Belovezh and Crimean periods is analyzed, and prospects for cooperation in the context of global changes are considered.

Materials and Methods

The study is based on the analysis of Russian foreign policy strategic documents of different periods, the use of analytical and statistical reports, official reports of specialized departments, media materials in Russian, English, Korean and other languages, which allows us to identify the evolution of priorities and directions of Russia's foreign policy strategy in the Asia-Pacific region. The author of the article used methods of comparative and content analysis, synthesis, generalization, as well as retrospective and diachronic methods. The combination of these methods ensured the formation of a holistic view of changes in the geopolitical status of post-Soviet Russia, taking into account modern geopolitical realities and changes in international politics.

Results

Belovezh period

The Belovezhskaya period (1991–2014) of international relations, characterized by the collapse of the USSR, the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the strengthening of US influence and the formation of a unipolar system, as well as the definition of its own geopolitical status and the vector of the direction of the main geopolitical priorities, set an important task for Russia: in the transformation and unpredictability of the crisis caused by the formation of a new statehood, it is necessary to preserve identity, ensuring the socio-political stability of Russia. Not without difficulties, the renewed Russian state laid a solid foundation for the implementation of both domestic and foreign political tasks. Vector strategic values were defined, reflected in the "Concept of National Security of the Russian Federation" of 1997 and the subsequent version of the document from 2000.¹ Soon the "concept" was replaced by a "strategy", which defined the goal of the policy at this stage, namely: preserving territorial integrity and sovereignty, returning the status of a world power and implementing sustainable development of the country [5].

The Russian Federation of the Belovezhskaya Pushcha period was little interested in the problems of integration into the Asia-Pacific region, the country was present here rather nominally, without clear strategic goals. However, this does not mean that work in the Asia-Pacific direction was not carried out at all. Thus, Russia was actively solving the problems of territorial claims with the PRC, work was carried out to stabilize relations with key Pacific actors (the USA and Japan), and the issue of restoring friendly relations with India was being resolved. The ideological basis for this activity was the concept of the legal continuity of the USSR. It should be noted that, despite the problem of disputed territories, the invariably cold and pragmatic approach on the part of China, Russia at the beginning of the Belovezhskaya Pushcha stage recognized the importance of the PRC in geopolitical and economic terms, increasing cooperation with the country. By the end of the 1990s, bilateral interstate relations were transformed from normalization to good neighborliness. This event was marked by a new doctrinal directive: the achievement of a multipolar world, which was enshrined in the corresponding declaration of April 23, 1997², which served as a good foundation for the transformation of Russian-Chinese relations into a strategic partnership [2].

1 On approval of the Concept of National Security of the Russian Federation: Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of December 17, 1997 No. 1300 (no longer in force). Available from: <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/11782>; The Concept of National Security of the Russian Federation, approved by the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of December 17, 1997 No. 1300 (as amended on January 10, 2000 No. 24). Collection of Legislation of the Russian Federation, 1997. No. 52. Article 5909; 2000. No. 2. Article 170.

2 Russian-Chinese Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Formation of a New International Order. Diplomatic Bulletin. P. 19–21.

Until 2013, all strategic thinking regarding the Asia-Pacific region was based on an overly optimistic assessment of trends, rather than on clearly defined realities. By the end of the Belovezhskaya era, statements about the crisis-resistance of the existing system of international interaction were replaced by more objective assessments, the unresolved structural problems were recognized, and most importantly, a change in the approach of the Russian Federation to the formulation of doctrinal guidelines was noticed, which, along with the changing international political and economic situation, prompted the state leadership to reassess values and, as a result, put forward new initiatives and interests [4]. The Belovezhskaya paradigm for Russia became a period of formation of the main doctrinal guidelines in the Asia-Pacific region: national security; strengthening sovereignty; strengthening democracy; pragmatism; multi-vector and multipolarity; consistent promotion of national interests by creating favorable external conditions, avoiding confrontation; restoration of the status of a world power.

Crimean period

By 2014, a critical mass of contradictions in the then existing system of international relations had accumulated. The growing hegemony of the United States, expressed in NATO expansion to the east, intervention in conflicts in the Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, as well as in the promotion of democratic values and a market economy through the mechanism of sanctions pressure, required geopolitical players to take action to balance the situation. Some scholars began to call the new paradigm of international relations the Crimean [1] paradigm; in their opinion, it was the Ukrainian crisis and the fact of the reunification of the Crimean Peninsula with Russia that became the most important bifurcation points, which changed the system of international law in a precedent-setting manner, as well as the entire system of international interaction, dealing a serious political blow to the positions of the United States and the West [1]. The attempts of the United States to maintain its dominance, along with Russia's desire to restore its global geopolitical status and the political and economic energy of China led to the formation of a limited-polar system of international interaction. Once a hegemon that directed the policies of other countries through sanctions pressure, it faced counter-sanctions. Chinese sanctions covered the activities of key American companies operating in the high-tech and industrial sectors, which led to significant economic losses. This measure also affected the export of strategically important resources and technologies to the United States. The activities of existing institutions supporting the global influence of the United States were disrupted. At the same time, the system of interaction that had formed was transitional, the basis of which was "political probing" [7]. The introduction of sanctions by China became a symbol of the growing confrontation. The United States remained a hegemon in key areas, however, in the person of the PRC and the Russian Federation, a pole of power began to form, the boundaries of whose influence, although blurred, could no longer be ignored.

Russia was ready for a new unstable world order, this conclusion can be made based on the analysis of the "Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation" 2013³, where the task of establishing flexible network alliances in order to maintain global financial and economic stability and international security was put forward. However, the transition to the Crimean paradigm also brought new serious problems for Russia, new challenges and threats that required an adequate and well-thought-out response. The country faced sanctions that drew attention to the contradictions of socio-economic development and the production sector.

Along with the confrontation of the collective West that had reached its apogee, the degradation of Russian-American cooperation, a new threat to Russia arose - the confrontation between the United States and China. The Russian economy is closely tied to the economies of these two countries, so the trade "battles" that unfolded during the Crimean period caused and continue to cause a lot of inconvenience and became an obstacle to achieving one of the main national interests - socio-economic development [2]. The Russian economy, and, consequently, all spheres of society's life began to feel a shortage of both finances and opportunities. Therefore, in 2015, a new national security strategy was formulated and adopted⁴, which emphasized that even in the Asia-Pacific region (in confrontation with Western countries) the situation is not at all favorable for the realization of national interests. The conceptual principles of the strategy did not differ much from the 2009 version⁵. However, there is a transition from a nomenclature unit to an ideological manifesto. This is evidenced by the emergence of the task of protecting and defending the population from ideological expansion and from information and psychological influence in general, as well as the task of preserving and developing Russian identity. The task of maintaining and developing spiritual and moral values has received primary importance in the sphere of culture. Russia began to need a sense of security and historical perspective more than ever and formulated this in its doctrinal documents. However, the cornerstone of this doctrine was the statement of the superiority of the spiritual over the material, which signals the acceptance of the primacy of Asian civilizational dogmas over Western ones. This clearly showed in which direction Russia is heading and who is civilizationally close to it. It was during this period that the Russian Federation made a geopolitical turn to the Pacific Ocean.

Russia is intensifying interactions within the region, especially with such organizations as the SCO, APEC, ASEAN, as a result of which many joint productive projects and enterprises with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region are emerging [3]. The basis for interaction has become the key advantages of Russia as a counterparty for Asian countries:

³ The concept of foreign policy of the Russian Federation, approved by the President of the Russian Federation on 12.02.2013. Available from: http://www.mid.m/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICk6BZ29/content/id/122186.

⁴ National security strategies of the Russian Federation: Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of December 31, 2015 No. 683. Collected Legislation of the Russian Federation. 2016. Vol. 4.

⁵ On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020: Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of May 12, 2009 No. 537. Code of Laws of the Russian Federation. 2009. Vol. 1.

resources, transport potential, the attractiveness of the idea of forming a multipolar world. Activities at Pacific forums with the main platform in the form of ASEAN (based on its centrality in the Asia-Pacific region) have proven to be extremely productive.

Despite various problems caused by the so-called "Asian paradox", the essence of which lies in the growth of tensions while maintaining and growing economic capacity, the Russian Federation and ASEAN have become strategically interconnected [8]. ASEAN will suffer if Russia loses the struggle for multipolarity, and Russia will lose if ASEAN loses its position as the central axis of regional interaction in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Prospect of Transformation

Crises and problems in the world forced post-Soviet Russia to reconsider its values. The value of democracy, which had long been a formal pass to world politics, began to appear less in official documents; undemocratic nature or the absence of the word "democracy" in official documents or the name of the country could become a pretext for the invasion of American forces. Russia gained self-confidence, as well as an external and internal enemy in the form of the United States, Russian populists, pro-Westerners and foreign agents. Did this help to cope with the emerging challenges? Of course, ideological issues and issues of cohesion were resolved. The state began to take the path of self-sufficiency, competent goal-setting, a value-based Russian identity is beginning to take shape, but the economy, and therefore other spheres of life, continue to face difficulties. Oddly enough, this has a beneficial effect on relations with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region. Most countries benefit from Russia's economic downturn. The interest of Pacific actors, who can acquire resources, use territory or lobby their interests economically at a low price, is growing.

Today, we can confidently talk about strengthening economic cooperation and regional security, developing transport and logistics infrastructure as primary national interests and strategic goals that contribute to increasing Russia's geopolitical status in the Asia-Pacific region.

Russia seeks to develop trade and economic ties with other countries in the region, including China, Japan and South Korea.

Today, Russian-Japanese relations remain complicated due to the ongoing territorial dispute between the countries. The situation is complicated by the confrontation between the collective West and Russia, in particular, Russia's implementation of a sovereign policy to ensure security on the country's western borders.

Japan, remaining in vassal relations with America, is forced to take measures that coincide with the American course. The Russian side treats this with understanding and expresses hope for a quick normalization of relations, as evidenced by public statements by the Russian establishment. One of the key areas of cooperation between Russia and Japan is energy. Japan is interested in importing Russian gas and oil [6], Russia, in turn, can receive investments from Japan to develop its energy projects in the Far East, systematically linking it with the center of the country.

Relations between Russia and the Republic of Korea have also changed due to the events of recent years. They can be characterized as dynamic and promising, which is consistent with the laconic description of the country formulated by G.V.Zinoviev: "[South Korea] is one of the friendliest among unfriendly countries"⁶. Both countries have extensive potential for cooperation in various fields, including economics, science and technology, culture and sports. Despite international sanctions and their periodic expansion, Russia and South Korea continue to trade. South Korean companies are finding ways to maintain economic ties with Russia through intermediary countries and alternative supply routes. Russia remains an important supplier of energy resources for South Korea, including oil and gas. Projects to build new pipelines and supply liquefied natural gas continue to be discussed at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, the Eastern Economic Forum, and various bilateral dialogue platforms.

Russia actively participates in diplomatic efforts to resolve conflicts in the region, in particular in resolving the Korean issue. Russia advocates dialogue and negotiations between North and South Korea, as well as between the DPRK and the United States, to create a multipolar system of regional interaction to ensure security in the region and prevent economic or other dominance of some countries over others. Active work is underway within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, aimed at developing economic and cultural cooperation between member countries, strengthening security in the region.

In particular, Russia supports the creation of a free trade zone within the SCO and is working to expand economic ties between the countries. Russian special services cooperate with colleagues from other SCO member countries in the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking and other regional security threats. The country seeks to improve the transport infrastructure in the region, including through the development of seaports and railways.

Work is underway to develop and modernize the Trans-Siberian Railway in order to improve cargo flow and reduce the time of delivery of goods to Asian countries, promoting the China-Russia-Europe project, which contributes to the development of transit transport communications in the region. A number of projects are being implemented on sea routes aimed at expanding and modernizing sea ports, such as the ports of Vladivostok, Nakhodka and St. Petersburg, with special attention being paid to the development of the Northern Sea Route. An important role is played by the construction and modernization of intermodal terminals, which ensure the transportation of goods between different modes of transport (rail, sea, road, etc.).

Discussion

Russia's desire to strengthen economic ties with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region is systemic and covers many areas. The intensive development of trade relations with China, the largest economic partner, includes large-scale investments in the energy sector, joint

⁶ Russian Ambassador called direct arms supplies to Ukraine a red line in relations with Seoul. TASS. Available from: <https://tass.ru/politika/19766145>.

construction of infrastructure facilities and technological cooperation. China is interested in stable supplies of Russian energy resources, and Russia gains access to Chinese technology and investment, which contributes to the modernization of its own industrial base.

No less significant are Russia's relations with ASEAN, which cover many areas, from military cooperation to joint scientific research. Joint energy projects, including nuclear energy, are among the key areas of cooperation. ASEAN is also interested in transport corridors linking Russia and Southeast Asia, which creates additional opportunities for trade and mutually beneficial investment projects.

An important element of Russia's strategic partnership with the Asia-Pacific region is participation in multilateral regional organizations such as the SCO and APEC. Within the SCO, Russia actively promotes initiatives to ensure regional security, combat terrorism, drug trafficking and other threats. Joint exercises and exchange of information between intelligence agencies help to strengthen trust and increase the level of security in the region.

In general, the strategic reorientation of modern Russia to the Asia-Pacific region is becoming an important element of its foreign policy doctrine. The transformation meets both internal needs for modernization and economic development, and external challenges associated with a change in the global balance of power. The Russian Federation continues to strengthen its position in the region, striving for harmonious and mutually beneficial cooperation with key Asian partners. Russia's current foreign policy strategy in the Asia-Pacific region is multifaceted and comprehensive, aimed at creating a sustainable and reliable foundation for future development.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that Russia's interests in the Asia-Pacific region have undergone a significant transformation. After the collapse of the USSR, Russia faced economic and political challenges, which contributed to a revision of its foreign policy priorities. The transformation of Russia's interests in the Asia-Pacific region is associated with the search for new opportunities for development and cooperation in the context of a changing global political situation.

Such geopolitical priorities as economic diversification, development of joint infrastructure projects and strengthening of military-strategic cooperation with Asian partners have significant potential and reflect Russia's desire to strengthen its geopolitical status both in the region and in the world as a whole.

The projects listed in the article not only open up new prospects for transit transportation between Europe and Asia, help reduce the time of delivery of goods, reduce transportation costs and increase the competitiveness of Russian routes in the world market, but also expand existing economic ties with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region, providing new markets and opportunities for investment cooperation.

At the same time, challenges related to changes in the global economy and the emergence of new geopolitical risks require constant attention and adaptation of the

existing strategy. Russia continues to seek a balance between strengthening national security and developing economic ties, which contributes to stability and sustainable development in the long term.

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Contribution of the author

The author declares no conflicts of interests.

Article info

Received: June 8, 2024. Approved after review: July 21, 2024. Accepted for publication: August 31, 2024. Published: September 23, 2024.

The author has read and approved the final manuscript.

Peer review info

«Russia & World: Scientific Dialogue» thanks the anonymous reviewers for their contribution to the peer review of this work.