Stosunki Międzynarodowe – International Relations
nr 2 (t. 54) 2018

ISSN 0209-0961
doi: 10.7366/020909612201802

Russia's Turn to the East: A Postcolonial Perspective

Konstantin K. Khudoley, Dmitry A. Lanko

St. Petersburg State University

If assessed within the framework of a postcolonial approach to international relations, the debate about the current "turn to the East" in Russia's foreign policy can be reduced to the question of whether Russia, a rising power itself, is seeking cooperation with rising Asian powers that is grounded in mutual recognition as equal strategic partners or whether Russia is seeking easy tactical domination over its Asian partners in order to improve its international performance vis-à-vis Western powers. This article references attempts of the former kind as a "turn to the East", and those of the latter kind as 'condescension to the Orient'. We look for factors that can influence foreign policy learning among the Russian elite towards recognising Russia's "Eastern" partners as equally important as its potential Western partners. We pay special attention to changes in the attitudes of part of the Soviet elite in the 1980s, recent changes in the composition of the Russian elite, relations among member states of the Eurasian Economic Union, Russia's relations with Asian powers like Japan, China and India, and finally Russia's approach to the situation on the Korean Peninsula. Having examined all those aspects, we conclude that there are factors that can result in a lasting "turn to the East" in Russian foreign policy rather than tactical "condescension to the Orient", which is predicted to have dramatic consequences for Russia itself.

Keywords: Russia, postcolonialism, foreign policy-making, Eurasian Economic Union, Japan, China, India, Korea.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Russia announced a 'turn to the East' in its foreign policy. The Russian Empire had already attempted such a turn in the 19th century, which led to military defeat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, the first Russian revolution of 1905–1907, the second and third Russian revolutions of 1917, and ultimately to the collapse of the Russian Empire. The Soviet Union attempted a 'turn to the East' in the 20th century, which led to military defeat in Afghanistan and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Will the new 'turn to the East' be any different? We assume that a 'turn to the East' in Russian foreign policymaking can only be successful if the country's elite learns a lesson from the postcolonial approach to international relations and eliminates the supercilious approach to Russia's partners in Eurasia, Asia

Konstantin K. Khudoley – Professor, Head of Department of European Studies, School of International Relations, St. Petersburg State University. **Dmitry A. Lanko** – Associate Professor with the Department of European Studies, School of International Relations, St. Petersburg State University.

and elsewhere, which is characteristic of Orientalist discourse, to use Said's term. Is there any chance that the Russian elite will learn to treat the country's partners in the 'East' as equal to its potential partners in the West? Despite some evidence pointing to the opposite, we claim that there are multiple factors that might help the Russian elite work out a non-Orientalist approach to its partners in the 'East', thus making Russia's current 'turn to the East' a success. We discuss those factors in this article.

The article consists of seven parts. In the first part, we discuss the concepts of 'turn to the East' and 'condescension to the Orient', the difference between them being that the former is free of the influence of Orientalist discourse, while the latter is determined by it. In the second part, we discuss the relationship between Orientalism and Russia, whose elite, on the one hand, partly relates to potential partners in the 'East' in a manner that can be described as Orientalist, but on the other hand suffers of being treated in an Orientalist manner by Russia's potential partners in the West. In the third part, we discuss past 'turns to the East' undertaken by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union; although Orientalist discourse determined both the imperial and the Soviet attempts, we will underline the change in the Soviet elite's treatment of potential Asian partners in the direction of recognising their equality in the 1980s, as manifest in Mikhail Gorbachev's Vladivostok and Krasnoyarsk speeches of 1986 and 1988. In the fourth part, we discuss domestic factors of the 'turn to the East' in Russian foreign policy, with a focus on the growing role of Chechnya's leader Razmzan Kadyrov as a 'man of the East' himself.

In the fifth part, we discuss the Eurasian Economic Union, in which Eurasian Kazakhstan, Central Asian Kyrgyzstan and Caucasian Armenia are more reliable partners of Russia than European Belarus – a fact that has influenced the views of the Russian elite. In the sixth part, we discuss the rise of Japan in the late 19th and early 20th century, and the rise of China and India in the late 20th and early 21st century, which has likewise influenced the views of the Russian elite and made Russian-Chinese, Russian-Japanese and Russian-Indian relations an important part of Russia's foreign policy. Finally, in the seventh part, we examine the case of the Korean Peninsula, which hosts two rival Korean states; we find that the Russian elite has learned to treat the two Korean states as equal to each other, thus paving the way towards learning to treat the Koreas as equal to a European state in the future. If they prove to influence Russia's foreign policy in a synergetic way, the factors discussed in parts 3–7 can make the Russian elite treat potential partners in Eurasia, Asia and other parts of the non-Western world as equal to potential Western partners, thus producing a successful 'turn to the East' in Russian foreign policy.

Turn to the East or Condescension to the Orient?

On 6 September 2013, Russia's president Vladimir Putin helped Germany's chancellor Angela Merkel wrapping a warm blanket around her shoulders while both

attended an outdoor event during the G20 summit in St. Petersburg. On 10 November 2014, he helped China's first lady Peng Liyuan in a similar way during the APEC summit in Beijing, thus indicating that Russia will do its best to treat its Eastern partners similarly to its Western ones. One may view this double demonstration of chivalry as a symbolic gesture that can help us understand Russia's 'turn to the East', which Putin made one of the aims of his presidency as of 2012[1] and which intensified after relations between Russia and its Western partners took a turn for the worse in 2014. While most Western powers – from the immediate European neighbourhood of Ukraine to countries as distant as Australia – condemned Russia, most Asian powers, most importantly China and India,[2] but not Japan, demonstrated indifference to the conflict over Ukraine.

Academic literature and the mass media usually refer to this recent change in Russia's foreign policy as the latter's 'turn to the East'. Russians themselves speak of their country's 'turn to the East' when discussing the foreign policy change in the English language. For example, the Moscow-based popular news website Russia Beyond used the term 'turn to the East'[3] when reporting on a meeting of the Valdai Club, a forum of Russian intellectuals, held in Singapore to discuss that specific foreign policy change. Chatham House, a British foreign policy think thank, discussed Russia's 'turn to the East'[4] earlier that same year. One can easily find Russia's 'turn to the East' in the titles of academic articles[5] and the front matters of edited volumes[6] devoted to the new foreign policy course.

These publications treat Russia's 'turn to the East' as a unique phenomenon, incomparable to the almost simultaneous and strikingly similar foreign policy changes in other countries, for example the American 'pivot to Asia' which characterised US foreign policy under Barack Obama.[7] Russia's 'turn to the East' can also be called a 'pivot to Asia', but the opposite, i.e. calling the US 'pivot to Asia' a 'turn to the East', is not possible. First, geographically, Asia is situated to the east of Russia, but to

[1] V.V. Putin, 'An Asia-Pacific Growth Agenda', *Wall Street Journal*, 6 September 2012, https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10000872396390443847404577629312716242648 (accessed on 8 January 2018).

[2] P. Chacko, A.E. Davis, 'The Natural/Neglected Relationship: Liberalism, Identity, and India-Australia Relations', *Pacific Review*, 2017, Vol. 30, No. 1, pp. 26–50.

[3] M. Korostikov, 'Russia's turn to the East outlined at Valdai meet', *Russia Beyond*, 19 December 2016, https://www.rbth.com/world/2016/12/19/russias-turn-to-the-east-outlined-at-valdai-meet_661664 (accessed on 8 January 2018).

[4] R. Connolly (chair), 'Russia's Turn to the East: Hopes and Realities', a Chatham House event, 7 April 2016, https://www.chathamhouse.org/event/russias-turn-east-hopes-and-realities (accessed on 8 January 2018).

[5] S. Fortescue, 'Russia's "Turn to the East": A Study in Policymaking', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 2016, Vol. 32, Issue 5, pp. 423–454.

[6] H. Blakkisrud, E.W. Rowe (eds), *Russia's Turn to the East: Domestic Policymaking and Regional Cooperation*, Cham: Springer, 2018.

[7] B. Obama, *Remarks to the Australian Parliament*, Canberra, Australia, 17 November 2011, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament (accessed on 8 January 2018).

the West of the US. Second, linguistically, when one speaks of a 'turn', one assumes that the move in question takes place on a par. One can turn left or right. One can turn back, though it is difficult both linguistically and physically to turn forward after a lengthy backslide.

However, if one turns upward, we say that the one 'ascends'; and if one turns downward, we say that the one 'descends' or even 'condescends'. This article seeks to determine which factors will make Russia's foreign policy change a true 'turn to the East' and not a 'descent from the West' followed by 'condescension to the East', as some critics argue. The difference between the two terms requires clarification. Speaking of one actor turning away from another towards a third actor in search of an alliance assumes that all three actors mutually treat each other as equal. Few international relations theorists, however, would agree that international relations are relations among equals. Among the realists, some argue that equality is desirable, because 'war is likely when power is not balanced and one side is preponderant', while others argue that it is desirable to avoid equality, because 'war is likely when power is relatively equal'.[8]

Proponents of the English school of international relations admit that 'the formal position of legal equality still allows huge amounts of practical inequality between core and periphery',[9] between countries belonging to international society and those not belonging to it, and that this can only be improved by means of transforming international society into a global society. In turn, proponents of the postcolonial approach to international relations focus on 'practical inequality', claiming that the nature of relations between the West and the Rest, in Hall's terms,[10] has not changed since the Age of Discovery in Western historiography. Instead of 'practical inequality', Said uses the term 'hegemony', which is rooted in 'the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures'.[11]

When one actor turns away from another towards a third in search for an alliance, such a turn becomes condescension if the first actor perceives himself as superior compared to the third. Or, such a turn becomes elevation if the first actor perceives himself as deficient compared to the third. Both condescension and elevation are rooted in Orientalist thought, where Oriental 'society is seen as either too weak […] or too strong'.[12] Classical Orientalism uses discourse that presents Oriental societies as weak and thus deficient compared to Western societies. At the same time, the perception

---

[8] J.A. Vasquez, *The Power of Power Politics: From Classical Realism to Neotraditionalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 246.

[9] B. Buzan, *From International to World Society? English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalization*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 216.

[10] S. Hall, 'The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power', in S. Hall, D. Held, D. Hubert, K. Thompson (eds), *Modernity*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, pp. 184–227.

[11] E.W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Knopf, 2014, p. 7.

[12] D. Tuastad, 'Neo-Orientalism and the New Barbarism Thesis: Aspects of Symbolic Violence in Middle East Conflict(s)', *Third World Quarterly*, 2003, Vol. 24, No. 4 (August), pp. 591–599.

of certain elements of Oriental culture as superhuman, for example exaltation about East Asian martial arts, is likewise an implication of Orientalist thought.

Russia: Orientalist and Oriental

One can easily find manifestations of Orientalist thought in Russia itself, but one can also find Orientalist thought about Russia in other Western countries. Many Russian scholars working in the field of Oriental studies became popular outside the country, for example, Shchutskii's works in Chinese linguistics[13] were published in the West after Shchutskii himself was sentenced to death and executed in 1938, one of the deadliest years of Stalin's repressions. Elements of Orientalist thought can be found in Russian literature, from Lermontov in the early 19th century[14] to Prilepin in the early 21st century.[15] Jersild concludes that the Orientalist discourse, which at the dawn of the 20th century justified Western imperialism as a 'white man's burden' in the West itself, was simultaneously characteristic of the Russian elite,[16] though Schimmelpenninck van der Oye rejects this conclusion.[17]

Various accounts of post-Communist Russia's foreign policy and of the country's international politics discourse provide evidence both of ascent in Russia's relations with the West in general and with individual Western countries in particular,[18] and of condescension in the country's relations with the East in general and with individual Asian and African countries in particular. Some accounts have found evidence of condescension in Russia's policy towards and discourse on all the post-Communist countries, not only those of Central Asia and the Caucasus, but also of Eastern Europe, such as Ukraine.[19] The behaviour of many Russian actors toward the West shares features with the behaviour of actors from Oriental countries, although sometimes the behaviour of these very same Russian actors toward the East can be described as Orientalist.

At the same time, discourses in many Western countries present Russia itself as an Oriental country. As Varisco notes, it is not clear 'at what point […] European-looking

---

[13] I.K. Shchutskii, *Researches on the I Ching*, transl. W.L. MacDonald, with an introduction by G.W. Swanson. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979.

[14] P. Scotto, 'Prisoners of the Caucasus: Ideologies of Imperialism in Lermontov's "Bela"', *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 1992, Vol. 107, No. 2, pp. 246–260.

[15] Z. Prilepin, *Pathologies*, Paris: Editions des Syrtes, 2007.

[16] A. Jersild, *Orientalism and the Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845–1917*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002.

[17] D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration*, New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2010.

[18] C. Owen, J. Heathershaw, I. Savin, 'How Postcolonial is Post-Western IR? Mimicry and Mētis in the International Politics of Russia and Central Asia', *Review of International Studies*, 2018, Vol. 44, No. 2, pp. 279–300.

[19] M. Ryabchuk, 'The Ukrainian "Friday" and the Russian "Robinson": The Uneasy Advent of Postcoloniality', *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 2010, Vol. 44, No. 1–2, pp. 7–24.

Russia fade[s] into the Eastern steppe'.[20] Russia is a part of Eastern Europe; thus, what Wolff finds characteristic of Western European discourse on Eastern Europe[21] is also characteristic of Western European discourse on Russia. The journey of Soviet studies as an academic discipline towards becoming Russian studies through the 'transitology' phase, which at times provided Cohen with grounds to claim that Russian studies were forgetting about Russia itself,[22] was uneasy, but the academic discipline has not vanished entirely. Western culture, especially movies about the Cold War era, have created many stereotypes about Russia, which are alive in the West even today, even though Russia is no longer as isolated a society as the Soviet Union was.[23]

Western scholarship on Russia and Western cultural objects describing Western actors meeting their Russian counterparts contribute to the formation of a discourse presenting Russia as deficient compared to the West. At the same time, Russian discourse about the West includes both a narrative of Russia as deficient compared to the West, and a narrative presenting Russia as superior to the West. In the 1990s, Neumann notes, Solzhenitsyn, 'following early Slavophiles and also Dostoyevsky, argue[d] that the Russians [were] morally superior to people of the West, because they [had] grown spiritually as they [had] been faced with hardships, such as communism, which [had] not been present in the West'.[24] Also, the narrative, which presents Russia as equal to the West has been present in Russian discourse for 200 years, since the beginning of the debate between the Slavophiles and the Westerners.[25]

In a similar manner, Russia's discourse on the East includes at least three narratives: one presenting the East as superior to Russia, another presenting the East as deficient with respect to Russia, and a third presenting the East as equal to Russia. Different Russian narratives on the West combined with different Russian narratives on the East provide a diverse picture of a multi-level structure of the system of international relations, within which the three – Russia, the West and the East – occupy three different levels, some being superior, while others are deficient. To assess the complexity of such multi-level structures, Lanko suggests using the term 'regional approach' to identify within a discourse different representations of similar events taking place in different regions of the world.[26]

---

[20] D.M. Varisco, *Reading Orientalism: Said and Unsaid*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007.

[21] L. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

[22] S.F. Cohen, 'Russian Studies without Russia', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 1999, Vol. 15, Issue 1, pp. 37–55.

[23] J.D.J. Brown, 'A Stereotype, Wrapped in a Cliché, inside a Caricature: Russian Foreign Policy and Orientalism', *Politics*, 2010, Vol. 30, No. 3, pp. 149–159.

[24] I.B. Neumann, *Uses of the Other: "The East" in European Identity Formation*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 180.

[25] G.M. Hahn, *Russia's Islamic Threat*, Hew Haven: Yale University Press, 2007, p. 232.

[26] D.A. Lanko, *Vliyanie regional'nogo podhoda na vneshnyuyu politiku (na primere Rossii i SShA v 2000–2008 godah)* (Influence of Regional Approach on Foreign Policy: A Comparison of Russia and the U.S. in 2000–2008), St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg University Press, 2014.

For example, Russia's turn away from the West towards the East can involve both condescension and elevation. In total, that provides nine different representations of Russia's 'turn to the East'. First of all, it is Russia's turn away from a superior West toward a deficient East. Second, it is Russia's turn away from a superior West towards a similarly superior East. Third, it is Russia's turn away from a deficient West towards a similarly deficient East. Fourth, it is Russia's turn away from a deficient West toward a superior East. Fifth, it is Russia's turn away from an equal West toward a superior East. Sixth, it is Russia's turn away from an equal West toward a deficient East. Seventh, it is Russia's turn away from a superior West toward an equal East. Eighth, it is Russia's turn away from a deficient West toward an equal East.

Finally, ninth, it is Russia's turn away from the West toward the East, both of which are perceived as equal to Russia. Only if this last representation of Russia's 'turn to the East' becomes dominant in Russia itself, the 'turn to the East' will be successful. One might suggest that the probability of success is no more than 11–12%. At the same time, there are factors indicating that although the probability of success is small, success is still possible. Below, examining Russia's domestic affairs, at its relations with other member states of the Eurasian Economic Union, its relations with the great powers of Asia – China, Japan and India – and at its approach to the situation on the Korean Peninsula, this article will look for the factors that make the probability of success, as defined above, greater.

The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union Turn East

Putin's abovementioned declaration from 2012 was not the first announcement of an impending 'turn to the East' made by a Russian leader. The Greater East, from the Balkans to the Japanese islands, has always played an important role in Russia's foreign policy. The main reason was that already in Muscovite times, the Russian state's expansion south and east was more successful than its attempts to expand west. The Russian Empire continued expanding east since its foundation in the early 18th century. Contemporary Russian historiography has provided a new paradigm of imperial history focusing on the 'imperial situation' of complex societies and multi-layered, irregular diversity.[27] Because of complexity, for most of Russia's history eastward expansion was chaotic and inconsistent. Until the mid-19th century, 'the Russian state, neither publicly nor privately, developed a philosophy or coherent ethos of expansion'.[28] It was not until the mid-19th century that the Russian Empire declared eastward expansion its top priority, thus manifesting the first 'turn to the East' in Russian politics.

---

[27] M. Mogilner, 'New Imperial History: POST-Soviet Historiography in Search for a New Paradigm for the History of Empire and Nationalism', *Review d'Etudes Comparatives Est-Ouest*, 2014, Vol. 45, No. 2, pp. 25–67.

[28] C.M. Foust, 'Russian Expansion to the East through the Eighteenth Century', *The Journal of Economic History*, 1961, Vol. 21, No. 4 (December), pp. 469–482.

Russia's first 'turn to the East' was a result of the empire's defeat in the Crimean War of 1853-1856. The war weakened the empire's position in Europe, thus pushing its government to reorient attention elsewhere. Russia took steps to acquire Turkestan, achieving this aim successfully despite British resistance. Simultaneously, Russia introduced a large-scale program of exploration of Siberia, which not only included the implementation of domestic infrastructure programs, such as the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, but also attempts to enhance the empire's influence in Asia, primarily in China, Korea and Mongolia. In the late 19th century, the Russian elite perceived all the Asian countries Russia interacted with within the framework of this policy – from Iran to Khiva, to China – as deficient compared to the Russian Empire. As a result, Russia's defeat in the 1904-1905 war against Japan, which demonstrated the limits of Russian capability in Northeast Asia, was a 'shock of […] unexpected humiliation' for the empire's elite.[29]

Russia's second 'turn to the East' took place in Soviet times. The Bolsheviks, who seized power in Russia in 1917, dreamed of a world socialist revolution. Initially, they expected socialist revolutions to take place in the industrially developed countries of Europe, but that did not happen. Thus, in the mid-1920s, they shifted their attention to the counties of Asia, primarily China. However, although the Bolsheviks made numerous declarations concerning the right of colonial peoples to self-determination, in real politics the leaders of the Soviet Union and of its offspring, the Communist International, perceived the predominantly rural countries of Asia as deficient compared to the rapidly industrially developing countries of Europe and North America. In the 1928 program of the Communist International, colonies and semi-colonies were cast as the 'world village', while their path to progress was declared possible only 'with the help and support of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the international proletarian movement as a whole'.[30]

That approach persisted even after the end of World War II and after the formation of the 'world socialist system'. The Communist Party of China recognised it and repeatedly expressed its concern over it. In the 1950s, the Soviet Union decided to stop supporting China's nuclear program aimed at developing nuclear weapons because of fears that continued support could worsen Soviet–US relations.[31] In China, this was seen as proof that the Soviet elite viewed China as deficient compared to the US, which became one of the main reasons for the split between the Soviet Union and China in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The Soviet leadership had not learned a lesson, however. In the late 1970s, the attempt to enhance Soviet positions

[29] D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, 'Rewriting the Russo-Japanese War: A Centenary Retrospective', *The Russian Review*, 2008, Vol. 67, No. 1 (January), pp. 78–87.

[30] *Kommunisticheskiy internatsional v dokumentah* (Communist International in Documents), *1919–1932*, Moscow: Partizdat, 1933, pp. 30–31.

[31] Z.H. Shen, Y.F. Xia, *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Partnership, 1945–1959: A New History*, New York: Lexington Books, 2015, pp. 224–229.

in the East by means of a military intervention in Afghanistan weakened the Soviet position outside the West and resulted in a military defeat that strengthened separatism in Soviet Central Asia.

The failure of Soviet eastern foreign policy, which became evident to some of the Soviet leaders already after the first few years of the war in Afghanistan, pushed them to make another attempt to 'turn to the East'. Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev's speech in Tashkent in 1982 became symptomatic of this new turn. In the speech, Brezhnev underlined the importance of Soviet relations with three rising powers of Asia, namely India, Japan and China, and suggested several practical steps aimed at improving relations with them.[32] Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of the Soviet Union, followed the same course by presenting a coherent vision of a new Soviet 'turn to the East' in his speeches in Vladivostok in 1986 and in Krasnoyarsk in 1988.[33] Gorbachev's vision of eastward Soviet foreign policy was grounded in recognition of the fact that the 'development of civilization is becoming more and more energetic in the East, in Asia, and in the Pacific Region'.[34] Gorbachev perceived Siberia and the Soviet Far East not as military outposts, but as regions ready for wide-ranging economic cooperation with any interested partners and countries. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the exclusion of communist rhetoric from Russian foreign policy significantly facilitated the establishment of economic relations with Asian countries, thus creating the basis for Russia's recent 'turn to the East'.

Ramzan Kadyrov and Russia's Turn to the East

When claiming that Russia's 'turn to the East' 'starts at home',[35] observers often refer to the need to attract investment to Russia's Far East as the driving force behind the country's foreign policy turn, assuming that investment in Russia's Far East is more likely to come from the neighbouring countries of East Asia and less likely to be from the West. We agree that the necessity of attracting investment to Russia's Far East is an important factor behind the country's 'turn to the East'. At the same time, the 'turn to the East' in Russian foreign policy has not boosted the influence of Russia's Far East regional leaders in the country's overall foreign policymaking, even though they have the practical experience of dealing with East Asian authorities and businesses

---

[32] L.I. Brezhnev, *Leninskim kursom: rechi, privetstviya, stat'i, vospominaniya* (Following Lenin's Course: Speeches, Addresses, Articles, Memories), Moscow: Politizdat, 1982, Vol. 9, pp. 442–444.

[33] M.G. Nossov, 'The USSR and the Security of the Asia-Pacific Region: From Vladivostok to Krasnoyarsk', *Asian Survey*, 1989, Vol. 29, No. 3 (March), pp. 252–267.

[34] M.S. Gorbachev, *Perestroyka i novoe myshlenie dlya nashej strany i dlya vsego mira* (Perestroyka and New Thinking for Our Country and the Whole World), Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoy literatury, 1987, p. 187.

[35] H. Blakkisrud, 'An Asian Pivot Starts at Home: The Russian Far East in Russian Regional Policy', in H. Blakkisrud, E.W. Rowe (eds), *Russia's Turn to the East: Domestic Policymaking and Regional Cooperation*, Cham: Springer, 2018, pp. 11–30.

that they can share with the federal authorities to improve the quality of the expertise underpinning Russia's foreign policy toward East Asian nations.

One might even say that the federal authorities are improving relations with East Asian nations despite the desires of the regional elites of Russia's Far East. At the same time, Putin's Russia witnessed a redistribution of influence in foreign policymaking among the leaders of the country's regions compared to Yeltsin's Russia, although the said redistribution did not give greater influence to the regional leaders of Russia's Far East. In Yeltsin's Russia, the most influential regional leader when it came to foreign policymaking was Yuriy Luzhkov, the mayor of Moscow in 1992–2010, who also had strong federal ambitions. To satisfy his federal ambitions, Luzhkov did his best to bring to power in other Russian regions politicians, who were loyal to him personally. For example, in the 'hotly contested 1996 mayoral elections in St. Petersburg […] Vladimir Iakovlev, then, in effect, deputy mayor and widely perceived as "Luzhkov's man", defeated the internationally known incumbent, Antoliy Sobchak'.[36]

As a result of that election, Putin, then a deputy mayor to Anatoliy Sobchak, lost his job. To satisfy his federal ambitions, Luzhkov did his best to attract Russia-wide popular support by means of interfering in foreign policy in a populist manner. For example, in 1996 'he managed to persuade the Russian Federation Council to pass a declaration stating that [Sevastopol] was Russian and not Ukrainian territory'.[37] As a result of those efforts, many observers considered Luzhkov the probable winner months before the 2000 presidential race in Russia. For example, in late 1999, Treisman placed him on top of the list of Yeltsin's potential successors, ahead of 'former prime minister Yevgeny Primakov, Krasnoyarsk governor Alexander Lebed, communist party chief Gennady Zyuganov [and] some wild-card candidate'.[38]

Putin ruined Luzhkov's federal ambitions. Luzhkov did not even run in the 2000 presidential elections. After having won the presidential elections, Putin adopted a domestic policy course aimed at strengthening the federation at the expense of regional autonomy. Luzhkov and other regional leaders had to adopt the new rhetoric. To do so, Luzhkov 'wrote a book, *On the Path towards an Effective State*, and an article opening with Pyotr Stolypin's famous phrase "we need great Russia"'.[39] This allowed Luzhkov to remain mayor of Moscow for another decade, although his influence on foreign policymaking significantly declined. It was only in 2010 that President Dmitry Medvedev fired Luzhkov for 'having lost the trust of the president'.[40]

---

[36] B.A. Ruble, 'The Future of Corporatism-II: The Rise of Moscow, Inc.', *The Wilson Quarterly*, 1998, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Spring), pp. 81–87.

[37] T. Bukkvoll, 'Off the Cuff Politics: Explaining Russia's Lack of a Ukraine Strategy', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2001, Vol. 53, No. 8 (December), pp. 1141–1157.

[38] D. Treisman, 'After Yeltsin Comes… Yeltsin', *Foreign Policy*, 1999–2000, No. 117 (Winter), pp. 74–86.

[39] G. Sharafutdinova, 'Gestalt Switch in Russian Federalism: The Decline of Regional Power under Putin', *Comparative Politics*, 2013, Vol. 45, No. 3 (April), pp. 357–376.

[40] Y.S. Wu, 'Russia and the CIS in 2010: Post-Crisis Tests', *Asian Survey*, 2011, Vol. 51, No.1 (January/February), pp. 64–75.

Today, the most influential regional leader is Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov. This also concerns his role in Russian foreign policymaking. Kadyrov gained power as a result of 'Chechenization', the Russian policy of 'co-opting (buying off) Chechen leaders and ultimately transferring the conflict from Russian to Chechen hands'.[41] That policy, which has proven successful, has always had a foreign policy dimension. Already in the early 2000s, Ahmad Kadyrov, Ramzan's father and president of Chechnya until his assassination in 2004, blamed the 'presence of many mercenaries from Arab countries in the rebel units'[42] as a factor complicating the ongoing 'counter-terrorist operation' in the region. After Putin appointed Ramzan Kadyrov the head of the Republic of Chechnya in 2007, the latter followed his father's line.

Kadyrov's involvement in Russian foreign policy has recently intensified. As in domestic politics, in foreign policy Kadyrov operates in a manner that is advantageous to the federal authorities, operating within Moscow's 'comfort zone' and pushing forward Moscow's interests.[43] Since 2014, Kadyrov has been actively involved in Russian policy towards Ukraine. In 2014, he successfully negotiated with Ukrainian security officials on the extradition to Russia of Russian journalists Oleg Sidyakin and Marat Saychenko, whom the Ukrainian secret services had arrested in the conflict zone in Eastern Ukraine.[44] Since the beginning of the Russian intervention in Syria in 2015, Kadyrov has vowed to 'personally join the fight against international terrorism'.[45] In 2017, he inspired tens of thousands of Russian Muslims to engage in protests over the killing of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar.[46]

Kadyrov is anti-Western in both words and deeds. According to Sakwa, 'Kadyrov repeatedly inveighed against the West's attempt to undermine Russia'.[47] Unlike Luzhkov, whose family moved to Europe after he was fired from his post as mayor of Moscow (although Luzhkov himself stayed in Russia, where he runs his own businesses), neither Kadyrov nor his family would be able to find refuge in the West if there are tensions with the federal government: since 2017, he has been subject to US sanctions under

[41] M. Matejova, 'Russian "Chechenization" and the Prospects of a Lasting Peace in Chechnya', *International Journal on World Peace*, 2013, Vol. 30, No. 2 (June), pp. 9–34.

[42] A. Kreutz, 'The Geopolitics of Post-Soviet Eurasia and the Middle East', *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 2002, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Winter), pp. 49–61.

[43] E.A. Souleimanov, G. Jasutis, 'The Dynamics of Kadyrov's Regime: Between Autonomy and Dependence', *Caucasus Survey*, 2015, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 115–128.

[44] A. Kashevarova, 'Kadyrov: "Ya lichno vel peregovory po osvobozhdeniyu zhurnalistov" (Kadyrov: "I negotiated liberation of journalists personally")', *Izvestiya*, 25 May 2014, https://iz.ru/news/571431 (accessed on 8 January 2018).

[45] Associated Press in Moscow, 'Chechen Leader Claims His Troops Eager to Fight "Scum" in Syria', *The Guardian*, 8 December 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/08/chechen-leader-claims-his-troops-eager-to-fight-scum-in-syria (accessed on 8 January 2018).

[46] A. Luhn, 'Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov at odds with Russia as he calls for protests over killings of Rohingya Muslims', *The Telegraph*, 4 September 2017, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/09/04/chechen-leader-ramzan-kadyrov-odds-russia-calls-protests-killings/ (accessed on 8 January 2018).

[47] R. Sakwa, 'Conspiracy Narratives as a Mode of Engagement in International Politics: The Case of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War', *The Russian Review*, 2012, Vol. 71, No. 4 (October), pp. 581–609.

the so-called Magnitsky Act.[48] Kadyrov is also pro-turn to East, not pro-condescension to the Orient. As an ethnic Chechen who is well aware of the Orientalist narratives in Russian discourse on Chechnya, he identifies as equal with potential partners both in the predominantly Muslim countries of Asia and Africa and in Asian and African countries in general.

The Eurasian Economic Union and Russia's Turn to the East

In the Eurasian Economic Union, European Belarus appears to be Russia's least reliable partner, compared to Eurasian Kazakhstan, Caucasian Armenia or Central Asian Kyrgyzstan. President Aleksandr Lukashenko 'has no intention of allying himself with either Moscow or Brussels, despite the Union agreement with Russia and the fervent wish of some in Brussels to believe him a closet pragmatist'.[49] Most of those opposing Lukashenko simultaneously perceive their country as 'European Belarus'[50] which would have had outstanding cooperation without Lukashenko. One might assume that among those in Belarus who currently support Lukashenko, there are quite a few who would support continued and even deeper involvement in the Eurasian Economic Union, regardless of Lukashenko; however, no corresponding study has been made to prove that assumption.

Unlike in Belarus, despite evidence of a postcolonial perspective in relations with Russia in Kazakhstani discourse,[51] a vast majority of the elite and people of Kazakhstan identify themselves not in contrast to Russia, but in contrast to the Central Asian nations to their south. Even before the Russian Empire incorporated the Kazakh Khanate in the 18th century, the latter's most dangerous rivals were not the Russian Empire in the north, but the khanates of Kokand and Khiva in the south. In the Soviet Union, 'the rest of Central Asia was named *Srednyaya Aziya* (Middle Asia), [but] the term *Srednyaya Aziya i Kazakhstan* (Middle Asia and Kazakhstan) became used to denote the whole of Soviet Central Asia'.[52] Today, 'Kazakh officials and analysts are accustomed to viewing their country as neither specifically European nor (Central) Asian, but as Eurasian'.[53] Those identity considerations make Kazakhstan almost inevitably a part of the Eurasian Economic Union, but they also provide the country

[48] S. Rubenfeld, S. Tally, 'Treasury Clamps "Magnitsky" Sanctions on Putin Ally in Chechnya', *The Wall Street Journal*, 20 December 2017, https://www.wsj.com/articles/treasury-clamps-magnitsky-sanctions-on-putin-ally-in-chechnya-1513805574 (accessed on 8 January 2018).

[49] B. Bennett, *The Last Dictatorship in Europe: Belarus under Lukashenko*, London: Hurst, 2011, p. 304.

[50] N. Bekus, 'European Belarus vs. State Ideology: Construction of the Nation in the Belarusian Political Discourses', *Polish Sociological Review*, 2008, No. 163, pp. 263–283.

[51] D.T. Kudaibergenova, 'The Use and Abuse of Postcolonial Discourses in Post-Independence Kazakhstan', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2016, Vol. 68, No. 5, pp. 917–935.

[52] Z. Zardykhan, 'Kazakhstan and Central Asia: Regional Perspectives', *Central Asian Survey*, 2002, Vol. 2, Issue 2, pp. 167–183.

[53] A.C. Kuchins, J. Mankoff, A. Kourmanova, O. Backes, *Reconnecting Eurasia: Kazakhstan's Evolving Foreign Economic and Security Interests*, London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015, p. 3.

with a more powerful role in decision-making in the Union, comparable only to that of Russia.

While Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia are founding member states of the Eurasian Economic Union, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan are new to it. According to Glazyev and Tkachuk, it was only in 2013 that 'Armenia decided to change course and join the Eurasian integration project in response to the discriminatory terms of a proposed EU association agreement'.[54] The fact that the European Union had nothing to offer to labour-exporting Armenia was only one reason for the country's seeking membership in the Eurasian Economic Union. Another factor is Turkey: since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenia has not only been part of the 'shared neighborhood'[55] between Russia and the European Union, but also of the 'overlapping neighborhood'[56] between Russia and Turkey. Eurasian integration not only helped Armenia boost its economy, but also secured Russia's recognition of the genocide of the Armenians in Turkey in 1915-1917.

Kyrgyzstan is not only another small country. Like Armenia, it is also a small country surrounded not by two, but by multiple great neighbours. It does not border Russia directly, but Russia is the country's biggest trading partner. Kyrgyzstan's elite appears to be very concerned about Kazakhstan's (but not Russia's) interference in the the country's domestic affairs; that concern sometimes leads to trade wars between the two nations, the most recent one in the autumn of 2017, even though it is hard for two members of the Eurasian Economic Union to hold a full-scale trade war between them.[57] Uzbekistan, Central Asia's most populated nation, plays an important role in the domestic affairs of Kyrgyzstan, whose southwestern Osh and Batken regions are home to large (28 and 15 per cent of the population respectively) Uzbek minorities. Last but not least, China is playing an increasing role in Kyrgyzstan, mostly economically, but also politically.[58]

When Russia, Kazakhstan and, to a smaller extent, Belarus decided to build the Eurasian Economic Union, they used the EU treaties as a model. Consequently, due to the similar institutional structure of the two unions, it is expected that in the long

---

[54] S. Glazyev, S. Tkachuk, 'Eurasian Economic Union: Achievements and Prospects', in P. Dutkiewicz, R. Sakwa, *Eurasian Integration: The View from Within*, London: Routledge, 2015, pp. 61–83.

[55] D. Averre, 'Competing Rationalities: Russia, the EU and "Shared Neighborhood"', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2009, Vol. 61, Issue 10, pp. 1689–1713.

[56] Ü. Çiğdem, 'Turkey's Policies in Its Overlapping Neighborhood with Russia and the European Union', in R. Piet, L. Simão (eds), *Security in Shared Neighborhoods: Foreign Policy of Russia, Turkey and the EU*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 53–74.

[57] I. Zuenko, 'Skandal v blagorodnom soyuze: kak konflikt Kazakhstana n Kirgizii proveryaet na prochnost EAES' (Scandal in a Noble Union: How the Conflict between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan Checks EAEU for Durability), *Carnegie Moscow Center*, http://carnegie.ru/commentary/73384 (accessed on 8 January 2018).

[58] D. Esenaliev, G. Asylbek kyzy, 'Eurasian Economic Union Policies and Practice in Kyrgzstan', *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-background-er/2017/eurasian-economic-union-policies-and-practice-kyrgyzstan (accessed on 8 January 2018).

run dialogue between them might result in a formal agreement,[59] but so far there has been no major breakthrough even in terms of establishing official dialogue. There has been no significant progress in concluding free-trade agreements between the Eurasian Economic Union and the non-EU countries of Europe. The Eurasian Economic Commission is negotiating with the Serbian government on the matter, but these negotiations are far from a conclusion. There has been greater success in Asia, where a free-trade agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union and Vietnam significantly increased the trade turnover between the parties already in the first year of its implementation.[60]

The Rise of Japan, China and India, and Russia's Turn to the East

In 1997, Brzezinski referred to China as 'not [a] global, but [a] regional' power, while calling Japan 'not [a] regional, but [an] international" power.[61] Recently, Taliaferro referred to Japan in the context of the United States' and its Pacific allies' inability to 'accommodate' Japan as a 'rising power' in the 1920s and 1930s, which became one of the reasons why Japan entered World War II and which today can be viewed as a lesson for contemporary old powers facing the necessity of 'accommodating' new 'rising powers', such as China, India, Russia, and Brazil.[62] Thus, one can find at least three 'Eastern' great powers today: Japan, which rose to such status in the early 20th century and which regained it in the late 20th century in spite of its defeat in World War II; China, which has already grown into the world's second greatest power, and which continues to grow; and India, whose rise to great power status has been slower due to lasting conflict with Pakistan and to a number of internal conflicts, but which nevertheless continues to rise.

Russian-Japanese relations have been on the rise since 2012, when Vladimir Putin returned as president of Russia and when Shinzo Abe returned as prime minister of Japan. At the same time, it is difficult to say to what extent the improvement of Russian-Japanese relations since 2012 has contributed to Russia's 'turn to the East' because it is difficult to say to what extent Japan is considered as 'East' in Russia. On the one hand, Japan is the easternmost country of Asia, although the sun rises in the Far

[59] E. Vinokurov, P. Balas, M. Emerson, P. Havlik, V. Pereboyev, E. Rovenskaya, A. Stepanova, J. Kofner, P. Kabat, 'EU-EAEU in Greater Eurasia: Long-Term Agenda for Economic Cooperation', *International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis*, http://pure.iiasa.ac.at/14331/1/19-01-2017%20Clean-Eurasia%20Project%20-%20November%20workshop%20report%20%28002%29.pdf (accessed on 8 January 2018).

[60] Eurasian Economic Commission, *Results of the first year of the Free Trade Agreement between Vietnam and the EAEU*, http://www.eurasiancommission.org/en/nae/news/Pages/10-10-17-1.aspx (accessed on 8 January 2018).

[61] Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, New York: Basic Books, 1997.

[62] J.W. Taliaferro, 'Did the United States and Allies Fail to Accommodate Japan in the 20s and the 30s?', in T.V. Paul (ed.), *Accommodating Rising Powers: Past, Present, and Future*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 173–199.

Eastern Russian town of Petropavlovsk Kamchatskiy almost at the same time as in Tokyo in the winter, and much earlier than in Tokyo in the summer. On the other hand, Japan is both 'East' and 'West' for Russia. Thus, according to Kuhrt, at the beginning of the 21st century, 'when Russian foreign policy players spoke of turning to the East, what was really meant was turning to China and away from Japan'.[63]

Japan has been hosting US troops since the end of World War II. That prevents Russia from making concessions to Japan in the territorial dispute between the two, because Russia fears to see US troops on the currently disputed islands as a result of such concessions. When in 2010 then Russian president Dmitry Medvedev visited Kunashir, the southernmost of the Kuril Islands,[64] the first time a Russian or Soviet leader ever did so, his message was that no concessions would be made. Japan is part of the G7, a group of leaders of the leading Western economies. That is why Russia attached so much importance to Putin's visit to Japan in 2016:[65] it was Putin's first visit to a G7 country after the G8 transformed into G7, when Russia was excluded in 2014. Like most Western countries, Japan is considered a source of technologies, not only capital, for Russia.[66] Finally, Japan sides with the US in the latter's rivalry with China, while Russia sides with China, although both Japan and Russia do so with reservations in order not to harm bilateral relations.

Part of the Russian elite is concerned that the elites of Western countries do not treat them as equals. In a similar manner, part of the Chinese elite is concerned about the Western treatment of China. Those concerns partly provided the ground for the Russian-Chinese rapprochement of the 1990s. According to Wilson, 'Russia's initial expectation for acceptance by the West as a full and equal partner was dashed, [thus] Russia and China found themselves increasingly united by a largely convergent view of issues in the international realm'.[67] Russia's perception of being unequally treated by the West combined with a similar perception on the part of China, however, it did not inevitably make Russia and China see each other as equals. At the same time, the latter is a necessary precondition for the creation of a durable Russian-Chinese alliance in such a shape as haunts the nightmares of part of the US elite.[68]

---

[63] N. Kuhrt, *Russian Policy towards China and Japan: El'tsin's and Putin's Period*, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 1.

[64] Kremlin, 'Trip to Kuril Islands', *President of Russia*, 1 November 2010, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/trips/9393 (accessed on 8 January 2018).

[65] Kremlin, 'Statements for the press and answers to journalists' questions following Russian-Japanese talks', *President of Russia*, 16 December 2016, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/53474 (accessed on 8 January 2018).

[66] Kremlin, 'Visiting INNOPROM-2017 International Industrial Fair', *President of Russia*, 10 July 2017, http://en.special.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55025 (accessed on 8 January 2018).

[67] J. Wilson, *Strategic Partnership: Russia-Chinese Relations in the Post-Soviet Era*, New York: Routledge, 2015, p. 1.

[68] L.J. Goldstein, 'A China-Russia Alliance?', *The National Interest*, 25 April 2017, http://nationalinterest.org/feature/china-russia-alliance-20333 (accessed on 8 January 2018).

On one hand, Russia is home to views of China as deficient – not only weak politically and militarily but also dependent on the West economically. Though China did not impose sanctions on Russia in 2014 when the West did so, Chinese businesses have become cautious when working with Russian businesses targeted by Western sanctions. On the other hand, there are also views about China as superior, as a 'model to follow'.[69] Similarly, China is home to views about Russia as deficient; part of the Chinese elite believes that it is not characteristic of the Russians to practice *Zhongyong*, the Doctrine of the Mean, in their lives; thus Russians and their foreign policy are often seen as inconsistent.[70] At the same time, there is a visible group among educated Chinese, who admire Russia. *Eluosi qingde* – passion for Russia – is the special term used in China to identify this group of people, which includes not only representatives of the older generation who were young at the time of the Soviet-Chinese friendship of the 1950s, but also younger Chinese educated in Russia.

Russian-Indian relations today are mostly confined to participation in international bodies such as the G20 and BRICS, mutual trade and military/technical cooperation.[71] Since the Cold War era, when India was considered the primary ally of the Soviet Union while Pakistan was considered the primary ally of the US, Russia has improved its relations with Pakistan, while India has improved its relations with the US. India's improving relations with the US sometimes raise concerns in Moscow, while Russia's improving relations with Pakistan and especially Russia's support to joint Pakistani-Chinese projects raise concerns in New Delhi. For example, mass media in India reacted quite nervously[72] when Russia backed the project to build a China-Pakistan transit corridor supposed to pass through territories within the traditional boundaries claimed by the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, including territory ceded to China by Pakistan in 1963 which has never been recognized by India.

Like their Chinese counterparts, part of the Indian elite has noticed that Russian state-owned enterprises are not always consistent in terms of keeping their business obligations. For example, in 2015, the Indian government blamed Russia for the delay and increase in price of the reconstruction of India's Vikramaditya aircraft carrier, outsourced to Russia.[73] To conclude, the same difficulties prevent Russia and China

---

[69] A. Lukin, *The Bear Watches the Dragon: Russian Perception of China and the Evolution of Russian-Chinese Relations since the Eighteenth Century*, New York: Routledge, 2016, p. 204.

[70] N. Ten, 'Predstavleniya sovremennykh kitaytsev o russkom narode i ego osnovnykh chertakh' (Contemporary Chinese Perceptions of the Russian People and Their Main Features), *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*, 2010, No. 4, pp. 189–200.

[71] A. Srivastava, 'Indo-Russian Military Technical Cooperation: Implications for Southern Asia', *World Affairs*, 1999, Vol. 161, No. 4 (Spring), pp. 200–210.

[72] S. Parashar, 'Russia Leaves India Stunned By Backing 2000 km China-Pakistan Business Corridor', *India Times*, 19 December 2016, http://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/russia-leaves-india-stunned-by-backing-2000-km-china-pakistan-business-corridor-267711.html (accessed on 8 January 2018).

[73] P. Kulkarni, 'Govt blames Russia for delay in aircraft carrier project', *Indian Express*, 19 December 2015, http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/govt-blames-russia-for-delay-in-aircraft-carrier-project/ (accessed on 8 January 2018).

from starting to perceive each other as equals as in the case of Russia and India, but the same factors also allow to conclude that the mission is not completely impossible. Ongoing conflict between China and India, in which both would like Russia to take sides (Russia cautiously avoids doing so), is another obstacle to the emergence of an equal relationship among the three. At the same time, their successful cooperation within BRICS is a positive indicator.

Case Study: Treating Both Korean States as Equal

Russia's foreign policy towards the Korean Peninsula deserves special attention in this article not only because the conflict around Korea has recently evolved into one of most prominent issues in contemporary international relations, but also because it represents an interesting case of foreign policy learning. In 1991, despite the fact that Russia formally inherited diplomatic relations with both the Korean People's Democratic Republic and the Republic of Korea, the Russian elite treated two Korean states completely differently. Over the following years, the Russian elite has been learning to treat the two Korean states as equals. Although the process of learning to treat the two Koreas as equals is far from complete in Russia, if the Russian elite succeed to reach equal treatment of the two Korean states, it will be an important step toward treating Korea, an 'Eastern' or 'Oriental' country, as equal to Russia, which, in turn, will be vital for Russia's potentially successful 'turn to the East' instead of 'condescending to the Orient'.

In the early 1990s, the Russian elite treated North Korea as weak and South Korea as strong. It was expected that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, North Korea's regime would not last long. Instead, North Korea managed to overcome the succession crises of 1994 and 2011, when Great Leader Kim Jong-Il succeeded Great Leader Kim Il-Song and Supreme Leader Kim Jong-Un succeeded Kim Jong-Il. The Russian elite could not help recognising the North Korean regime's ability to survive; thus 'although the DPRK-Russia friendship treaty was officially abandoned in September 1996, the two nations [seemed] to be on their way to recovering and promoting a working dialogue'.[74] Another reason for the improvement of relations between Russia and North Korea in the late 1990s was the general change in Russian foreign policy that occurred after the presidential elections of 1996 in Russia.[75] The Russian elite realised that North Korea was not as weak as they had previously thought. Thus, in 2000, Russia and North Korea signed a Friendship Treaty, although the latter differed from the Soviet-North Korean treaty in that it did not include provisions on mutual military assistance.

---

[74] H.S. Youn, 'Changes in DPRK-Russia Relations 1989–1999: Before and After Kim Jong-Il', *The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, 1999, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Fall/Winter), pp. 434–463.

[75] V.V. Mikheev, 'Russian Policy towards Korean Peninsula after Yeltsin's Re-Election as President', *The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, 1997, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Summer/Fall), pp. 348–377.

Part of the Russian elite considered South Korea an example to be emulated in the early 1990s. Those among the Russian elite who did not expect Russia to achieve the living standards and democracy scores comparable to those of West European or North American countries, looked to different examples, not only in the west, but also in the east. Almost twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union some Russian scholars still asked why, despite similar starting conditions, Russia had failed to follow South Korea's path.[76] The obsession of part of Russia' elite with South Korea and other East Asian "tigers" ended with the mid-1990s financial crisis in East Asia, which hit the Russian economy badly in 1998,[77] thus making it impossible even for those who were most obsessed with the South Korean experience not to notice these drawbacks. The Russian elite realised that South Korea was not as strong as it had previously thought.

In the 2000s, the importance of the Korean Peninsula for Russian foreign policy grew, with Russia's Asian policy becoming more active, in line with the resurgence of the country's international profile.[78] The Russian elite then treated issues related to North Korea mostly as security issues, while viewing issues related to South Korea mostly as economic issues. When Putin visited Pyongyang in 2000, and when Kim Jong-Il visited Russia in 2002 and 2011, Russian mass media reports were filled with accounts of the importance of those visits on security in Northeast Asia. During the second North Korean nuclear crisis of the early 2000s, Russia 'came to participate in multinational talks on North Korea's nuclear problem for the first time'.[79] At the same time, when Putin visited South Korea in 2001 and 2013, and when Medvedev visited South Korea in 2010, or when South Korea's President Roh Moo-Hyun visited Russia in 2004, economic issues were the focus of the Russian mass media. Russia was interested in South Korea's investments and technologies, while South Korea was interested in Russia's market and energy resources.[80]

Recently, relations with South Korea have become not only an economic but also a political issue for Russia. Likewise, Russia has condemned the North Korean nuclear program. Russia has also condemned the deployment of the American Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system to South Korea.[81] In a similar manner, relations with North Korea have become not only a military and political but also an economic

---

[76] S. Guriev, E. Zhuravskaya, 'Why Russia is Not South Korea?', *Journal of International Affairs*, 2010, Vol. 63, No. 2, *Rethinking Russia* (Spring/Summer), pp. 125–139.

[77] H. Pesonen, 'Assessing Causal Linkages between the Emerging Stock Markets of Asia and Russia', *Russian & East European Finance and Trade*, 1999, Vol. 35, No. 2 (March-April), pp. 73–82.

[78] G. Toloraya, 'Russian Policy in Korea in a Time of Change', *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, 2009, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp. 67–84.

[79] S.H. Joo, 'Russia and the North Koreas Nuclear Crisis', in S.H. Joo, T.H. Kwak (eds), *North Korea's Second Nuclear Crisis and Northeast Asian Security*, London: Routledge, 2016, pp. 133–150.

[80] B.S. Shin, 'Post-Cold War Russian Foreign Policy and the Korean Peninsula', in T. Akaha, A. Vasillieva (eds), *Russia and East Asia: Informal and Gradual Integration*, London: Routledge, 2014, pp. 130–153.

[81] I.S. Lantsova, 'Politika SShA po otnosheniyu k Severnoy Koree: konets XX – nachalo XXI veka (U.S. Policy towards North Korea: late 20s – early 21st century)', *POLITEX: Politicheskaya Ekspertiza*, 2014, Vol. 10, No. 4, pp. 185–198.

issue for Russia. Despite its 2017 response to the intensifying development of North Korea's nuclear program, Russia supported the UN Security Council's Resolution 2375, which, among other things, banned North Korean nationals from working abroad, including in Russia (prior to it some 35,000 North Koreans officially worked in Russia, thus playing an important role on the Russian labour market). Russia's attempts to connect the Trans-Korean Railway to the Russian Trans-Siberian Railway are not only important in terms of decreasing tensions on the Korean Peninsula; the connection is also expected to have a positive economic effect on Russia's trade not only with North and South Korea, but also with China.

Similarly, Russia's and the two Korean states' joint effort to build the Trans-Korean natural gas pipeline is to the same extent a project aimed at peace-building on the Korean Peninsula, as it is a commercial project expected to benefit all partner countries, if implemented.[82] To conclude, today's Russian elite perceives North Korea as neither much weaker nor much stronger than South Korea; both Koreas are important to Russia's foreign and security policy, but also to Russia's foreign economic relations. Of course, treatment of the Korean People's Democratic Republic and the Republic of Korea as equals is far from treating both or either of the Korea(s) as equal to Russia. At the same time, the former is a prerequisite of the latter. By learning to treat both Korean states as equals the Russian elite is learning to make a 'turn to the East', not 'condescension to the Orient'.

Conclusion

Whenever a state declares a 'turn to the East', a 'pivot to Asia' or a similar foreign policy change, it is important to distinguish between a true 'turn to the East', grounded in readiness of the state's elite to cooperate with potential partners in the 'East' on a par with its potential partners in the West, and 'condescension to the Orient', grounded in expectations of easy domination over potential 'Eastern' partners perceived as deficient compared to potential Western ones. Although many in Russia's contemporary elite have expectations of the latter kind, this article finds several factors that in combination can result in their learning to treat 'Eastern' partners as equal to Western ones. The elite's dissatisfaction with the presumed inability of Western partners to treat Russia as an equal can result in a desire to avoid repetition of the West's 'mistaken' treatment of Russia in Russia's own policy towards partners in the East. Already in the 1980s, some members of the Soviet elite demonstrated readiness to cooperate with potential Asian partners as equals; not only Gorbachev's 1986 and 1988 speeches in Vladivostok and Krasnoyarsk manifested such readiness, but also Leonid Brezhnev's 1982 speech in Tashkent.

---

[82] J.W. Yun, 'International Cooperation for the Construction of South Korea – North Korea Russia Pipeline Natural Gas (PNG): Effectiveness and Restrictions', *The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, 2015, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Spring/Summer), pp. 71–100.

In the 1990s, when Russia was implementing a pro-Western foreign policy, the most influential members of the elite, such as Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov, perceived potential partners in the West as superior to potential partners in Asia. Recently, however, Chechnya's leader Ramzan Kadyrov has become Russia's most influential regional leader in terms of the country's foreign policy; being a 'man of the East' himself, he does not make a difference between potential partners in the East or the West. In the Eurasian Economic Union, Russia's top foreign policy priority, European Belarus, is the least reliable partner compared to Eurasian Kazakhstan, Central Asian Kyrgyzstan and Caucasian Armenia. The economic rise of Japan in the mid-20th century, and of China and India in the late 20th century have made relations with those Asian countries of strategic importance for many among the Russian elite. Finally, while part of the Russian elite prefers cooperation with North Korea, another part prefers cooperation with South Korea, thus contributing to close-to-equal treatment of the two Korean states in Russian foreign policy.

All of those factors combined make it possible to conclude that the current 'turn to the East' in Russia's foreign policy can result in the establishment of cooperation between Russia and its Asian partners within whose framework all parties treat mutual cooperation as equally valuable as possible cooperation with potential Western partners. If that is achieved, Russia's recent foreign policy change will not become another 'condescension to the Orient', with dramatic outcomes to Russia itself, but a true 'turn to the East', of which both Russia and its Asian partners will benefit in a mutual and lasting manner.

Regardless of whether Russia's relations with its Asian partners develop in accordance with that scenario or whether more Orientalist elements appear in Russia's policy towards Asia, postcolonialism will remain a fruitful approach to studies of Russian foreign policy. In particular, it will provide tools helpful in understanding Western approaches to Russia. Diversity will remain an important feature of Russia, including its foreign policy. Thus, even if viewing Asian partners as equals becomes the dominant tendency in Russian foreign policy, some Russian actors will inevitably approach their Asian partners in a condescending manner in particular situations. Postcolonialism will provide useful assessment tools for examining those situations.

The number of attempts to assess relations between Russia and other post-communist countries, not only those of the former Soviet Union but also those of Eastern Europe, with the help of the postcolonial approach will mount. Finally, some scholars will apply the postcolonial approach not only to Russian foreign policy, but also to its domestic affairs, including relations between the federal centre and the predominantly ethnically-Russian European part of the country on the one hand, and the largely Muslim regions of the Volga and Northern Caucasus, Siberia and the Far Eastern parts of the country on the other hand. While the postcolonial approach will provide better understanding of Russian foreign policy, evidence from Russia will also enrich the postcolonial approach itself.