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The Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States from Russia's Strategic Perspective

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Abstract: The Trump administration of the United States has accelerated the advancement of the “open and free Indo-Pacific” strategy since 2017. From a geopolitical point of view and in terms of its national interests, Russia has generally been critical of this strategy, believing it has posed certain challenges to its “Pivot to the East” strategy. Meanwhile, Russia is rejoicing for not being the primary target of US containment in the region and has sensed a new opportunity for exercising its Asia-Pacific diplomacy in the context of the Indo-Pacific strategy. Based on this situation, Russia has made a flexible and pragmatic policy response to it. However, Russia will inevitably face many restraints. In the future, Russia will seek to maximize its strategic interests on the basis of adhering to its inherent principles of Asia-Pacific diplomacy.

Keywords: Russia-US relations, Indo-Pacific strategy, major-country relationship, Russia's diplomacy

Since the Ukraine crisis in 2014, Russia has accelerated the advancement of its “Pivot to the East” strategy under Western isolation and sanctions, while the Trump administration of the United States introduced the “open and free Indo-Pacific” strategy at the end of 2017, which unexpectedly conflicts with Russia's aforementioned strategy in the Asia-Pacific. Although not the primary containment target of the US Indo-Pacific strategy, Russia has had a relatively comprehensive assessment of the intentions, connotations and impacts of this strategy from its unique geopolitical and national interests, based on which a flexible and pragmatic policy response

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has been made.

Russia's Cognition of the Indo-Pacific Strategy

Although the concept of Indo-Pacific did not originate from American academia, the American strategic community has long been concerned with this region. As early as the Obama administration, the term “Indo-Pacific” had been mentioned several times. After Trump came to office in 2017, the Indo-Pacific was formally introduced as an important strategic concept when the administration substituted the Asian-Pacific rebalancing strategy pursued by its predecessor with its own policy strategy that emphasized competition toward China. In November of that year, Trump officially used the concept of Indo-Pacific in place of Asia-Pacific during his first trip to Asia, when he proposed to build an open and free Indo-Pacific. In both the National Security Strategy of the United States of America publicized by the Trump administration in December of that year and the National Defense Strategy of the United States of America introduced in January of the following year, building a free and open Indo-Pacific was declared to be a priority for American foreign policy. In recent years, the connotation of the Indo-Pacific strategy pursued by the US has been constantly enriched and refined by official statements and documents. On the whole, according to American beliefs, this strategy covers a geographical region that “stretches from the west coast of India to the western shores of the United States”¹; focuses on digital economy and cyber security as well as energy and infrastructural development in economy; relates to maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster reduction, fighting against transnational crimes, and enhancing peace-keeping capacities and security; and relies on the US-Japan-India-Australia quadrilateral mechanism resumed in 2017, which recently has been constantly upgraded and expanded in its level and scope of cooperation. So to speak, the Indo-Pacific strategy has increasingly become a major justification for the US to engage in geo-competition with China and counterbalance its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The US persistence in promoting its Indo-Pacific strategy has aroused

¹ National Security Strategy of the United States of America, White House, December 2017, 45-46.

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great concern in Russia because it is extremely sensitive to geopolitics. As a land and sea power that spans 9,000 kilometers east to west across the Eurasia land mass with dual attributes of both Europe and Asia, Russia has not only a complicated and unique perspective toward the entire Eurasia region, but also a special and persistent pursuit for access to the Indian Ocean. Throughout history, one of Russia's core diplomatic strategies was to open a southward passage to the Indian Ocean. In the 1960s, when the British was withdrawing its military from the region east of the Suez Canal, the rising Soviet nation tried to secure a path to the coast of the Indian Ocean and increasingly expanded its strategic presence in the region, while its assistance to India had already lasted over 30 years. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, particularly since Putin's reign began, Russia has been actively expanding diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region, not only consolidating relations with its traditional partner India, but also attaching increased importance to the significance of Southeast Asia. As a result, Russia has closely followed and carefully studied the Indo-Pacific both as a concept and a strategy. In general, Russia has remained critical of the US Indo-Pacific strategy, as an article published by the Valdai Discussion Club pointed out, Russia has been officially swinging between "cautious concern" and "outright rejection" with regard to this new concept of Indo-Pacific.¹

First, Russia believes this Indo-Pacific strategy has been deliberately engineered by the United States for its own interests. In February 2019, during a visit to Vietnam, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov expressed that there are currently two forms of integration in Asia, one of which is "natural" and "life-derived," such as the Russia-China-India dialog, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the BRICS countries, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), among others, while the other is "man-made" and engineered by the United States.² In January 2020, Lavrov made another statement specifically about the Indo-Pacific concept, saying Russia is not against any "philosophical terms," but it needs to uncover the essence of this new concept. The Indo-Pacific strategy is a continuous effort by an external

¹ "India, Russia and the Indo-Pacific," accessed July 30, 2020, <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/india-russia-and-the-indo-pacific/>.

² "Тонкие красные «клинья» ," accessed November 21, 2019, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3894781>.

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force to reorganize the existing order in the region with the aim of solving its own narrow tasks and serving its own interests. In June 2019, Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fumin pointed out at the Shangri-La Dialog, some states are attempting to build a military and political bloc with the so-called Indo-Pacific strategy under the pretext of promoting a new regional layout plan, while this concept, however, is based on the geopolitical interests of an individual state. Therefore, this strategy will do no good to the region.¹ Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov also asserted, the essence of the Indo-Pacific concept is very simple, as it has no purpose other than to divide us from outsiders, the sheep from the goats, and the democratic countries from the non-democratic ones, leaving the judgment to the one who proposed such a concept.²

Second, Russia affirms the Indo-Pacific strategy has strong political and military intentions. From Russia's perspective, the US is shaping the strategy to lead to the polarization of the Asia-Pacific region, not only creating tension, but also undermining the existing regional order. As a report from the Russian International Affairs Committee said, the Indo-Pacific strategy is not only a bilateral arrangement, but also one that emphasizes the multilateral coordination of actions. In short, this strategy will lead to bipolar confrontation at the global level and in the Indian Ocean, thus giving rise to mistrust and suspicion among regional partners.³ Lavrov put it bluntly, saying that the Indo-Pacific concept is not intended for unity but for destruction, as its real intention is to divide the countries in the region into different interest groups and weaken the function

¹ "Russian Deputy Defense Minister Criticized the US at the Xiangshan Forum: the Indo-Pacific Strategy Is Counterproductive to the Development of the Asia-Pacific Region," accessed December 6, 2019, <https://world.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnKkNbC>.

² Выступление заместителя Министра иностранных дел России И. В. Моргулова на Четвертой международной конференции, "Россия и Китай: сотрудничество в новую эпоху," Пекин, 29 Мая 2018, accessed November 24, 2019, <http://thailand.mid.ru/key-issues/4355-vystuplenie-zamestitelya-ministra-inostrannykh-del-rossii-i-v-morgulova-na-chetvertoj-mezhdunarodnoj-konferentsii-rossiya-i-kitaj-sotrudnichestvo-v-novuyu-epokhu>.

³ "Политика США В Индо-тихоокеанском Регионе: Последствия для России," accessed July 31, 2020, <https://russiancouncil.ru/activity/workingpapers/politika-ssha-v-indo-tikhookeanskom-regione-posledstviya-dlya-rossii/>.

and role of the regional mechanisms that govern state-to-state relations, so as to establish American dominance in the region.¹ Morgulov also sharply pointed out, proponents and apologists of containment policies are becoming increasingly unpredictable in the Asia-Pacific region, which has made the regional situation more and more unstable, as changing the existing institutions and framework of inter-state relations could shake the foundation of the region's inherent order.

At the same time, Russia believes the US Indo-Pacific strategy will undermine the centrality of ASEAN in addressing regional security issues. For years, Russia has advocated for the establishment of a security cooperation framework in the Asia-Pacific, emphasized the indivisibility of security in the region, and hoped to build an inclusive and institutionalized multilateral security mechanism. It is Russia's belief that ASEAN has established cooperation mechanisms with its interlocutors, such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Forum, and the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting, which have become the cornerstones for safeguarding security in the Asia-Pacific region.² In early November of 2019, when interviewed by the Bangkok Post, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev expressed that Russia advocates for the maintenance of an efficient system of state-to-state relations, which has been formed via ASEAN and has performed well over the years. Therefore, the American initiative has posed a serious challenge to ASEAN countries, because such an initiative would diminish the significance of ASEAN's existence and deprive it of its key role in resolving regional security issues.³ Ovchinnikov Alexey Mikhailovich, Director of Asia and Pacific Cooperation Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry, also claimed that with the development of the American quadrilateral mechanism, the function of ASEAN-centered multilateral institutions has

¹ “Лавров назвал деструктивной концепцию США в Индо-Тихоокеанском регионе,” accessed June 22, 2020, <https://ria.ru/20200113/1563383094.html>.

² “Russian Deputy Defense Minister Criticized the US at the Xiangshan Forum: the Indo-Pacific Strategy Is Counterproductive to the Development of the Asia-Pacific Region,” accessed December 1, 2019, <https://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2019-06-03/doc-ihvhiew6468631.shtml>.

³ “The US Policy Was Criticized by Prime Ministers of Russia and Malaysia, Particularly the Indo-Pacific Strategy and Protectionism,” accessed December 1, 2019, <http://www.cankaoxiaoxi.com/world/20191104/2394584.shtml>.

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begun to suffer.¹ Russian scholars sharply pointed out that the Indo-Pacific strategy pursued by the US has caused some ASEAN countries, Indonesia in particular, to find themselves on the periphery of the newly divided region, which will bring multiple problems to the stability of the regional situation.²

Third, Russia deems that all parties concerned have varied understandings of the Indo-Pacific strategy with each taking what it needs from it. Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu pointed out at the Beijing Xiangshan Forum in June 2019 that Russia has been very concerned with the concept of the Indo-Pacific, acknowledging that there are various definitions of it with essential differences in some respects.³ Meanwhile, Russian academia has made a profound and detailed study of the concept. Alexei Kupriyanov, an expert from the Valdai Discussion Club's expert bank, held that a detailed study of the Indo-Pacific concept will reveal that every party involved has its own definition, while the US position is not dominant. Although the US put great efforts into including Japan, the Philippines and Malaysia in the east of the Indo-Pacific region, it was only met with resistance from most of the relevant countries.⁴ So far as the strategic intention is concerned, Associate Professor Lukin from the Russian Far Eastern Federal University believes that the American goals are obvious, namely to suppress the expansion of China's influence, boycott the BRI, and accuse China of undermining the sovereignty of its neighbors by using predatory economic methods.⁵ Bespalov, deputy website chief editor of the Valdai Discussion Club, spoke to the heart of India when he asserted that the Indo-Pacific strategy has brought the country from the periphery of the Asia-

¹ "МИД РФ: механизмы в рамках индо-тихоокеанской концепции не должны подменять работу АСЕАН," accessed October 9, 2020, <https://tass.ru/politika/9085441>.

² Колдунова Е.В., ЮГО-ВОСТОЧНАЯ АЗИЯ ПЕРЕД ВЫЗОВАМИ ИНДО-ТИХООКЕАНСКИХ КОНЦЕПЦИЙ, ЮГО-ВОСТОЧНАЯ АЗИЯ: АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ РАЗВИТИЯ Том I, № 2 (43), 2019.

³ "Шойгу прокомментировал продвигаемую США Индо-Тихоокеанскую инициативу," accessed November 11, 2019, <https://ria.ru/20191021/1560009347.html>.

⁴ "Индо-Тихоокеанский регион: терминологический трюк или новые возможности для России?," accessed October 3, 2020, <http://geo-politica.info/indo-tikhookeanskiy-region-terminologicheskii-tryuk-ili-novye-vozmozhnosti-dlya-rossii.html>.

⁵ "Артём Лукин: Индо-Тихоокеанская стратегия Трампа," accessed October 10, 2020, <https://russiancouncil.ru/blogs/dvfu/33964/>.

Pacific to the center stage, which is strategically intended to establish a dynamic geopolitical balance in the context of China's continuous rise and growing concerns of the US and the West over the region.¹ Lead Researcher Zhivola from the Eurasian Institute of Contemporary International Studies under the Russian Foreign Ministry held that India does not intend to violate the most important principle of strategic independence in its foreign policy, and has always been cautious about getting involved in any military groups.² India does not want to target any country and undermine ASEAN's centrality,³ nor does it wish to be too close to the US and be bound by its obligations.⁴ At the same time, Zhivola further pointed out that while Japan shares America's goal of containing China, it does not display much anti-China sentiment, as it is a close neighbor and has intimate economic and trade relations with it.⁵ Instead, Japan focuses more on the economic aspects of the strategy, emphasizing infrastructural development and freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region, while still recognizing the centrality of ASEAN in resolving regional security issues.⁶ Zhivola also believes that Australia is at the forefront of implementing the Indo-Pacific strategy, as it is eager to enhance its regional influence and shed the marginality of its regional identity through the quadrilateral mechanism,⁷ using this strategy as a means to define its role as a major regional ally of the US.⁸ Associate Professor Kortunova from the Center for ASEAN Studies at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations claimed that for Southeast Asian countries, as different understandings of the Indo-Pacific strategy all have explicit or implicit anti-China connotations, one of the major problems they face is disunity within

¹ "Прощай, АТР, здравствуй, Индо-Пацифика?" accessed September 13, 2020, <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/proshchay-atr-zdravstvuy-indo-patsifika/>.

² "Индо-Тихоокеанские концепции," accessed September 30, 2020, https://new.dipacademy.ru/documents/35/i-t_consept.pdf.

³ "India, Russia and the Indo-Pacific," accessed September 13, 2020, <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/india-russia-and-the-indo-pacific/>.

⁴ "Прощай, АТР, здравствуй, Индо-Пацифика?"

⁵ "Индо-Тихоокеанские концепции."

⁶ "Индо-Тихоокеанская доктрина Синдзо Абэ — основа будущей внешней политики Японии," accessed September 12, 2020, <https://yandex.com/turbo/expert.ru/s/2020/09/11/doktrina-sindzo-abe---osnova-buduschej-vneshnej-politiki-yaponii/>.

⁷ "Индо-Тихоокеанские концепции."

⁸ "На смену АТР идет ИТР?" accessed September 12, 2020, https://www.eastrussia.ru/material/na_smenu_atr_idet_itr/.

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ASEAN and a lack of consensus in responding to the strategy.¹

Fourth, Russia admits the Indo-Pacific strategy is mainly targeted at China. As soon as the United States unveiled the Indo-Pacific strategy, a Russian scholar succinctly stated that projects related to the Indo-Pacific are not directly related to Russia at all, and the strategy does not consider Russia as a major player in the Indian Ocean or in the whole of the Asia-Pacific region.² A report from the Russian International Affairs Committee also put it bluntly, stating that the strategy is aimed at containing China, supporting the policy proposed by Japan, bringing India in, and encouraging ASEAN to adopt a tougher stance against China. In fact, the US does not see Moscow as a major player in the region, which means it is ignoring Russia's political and economic clout.³ This report further claims, the concept of a free and open Indo-Pacific region is not targeted against Russia. Under such circumstances, this strategy of the US is not intended to contain Russia. In the eyes of Washington, its rivalry with Beijing has masked the difficulties in its relations with Moscow.⁴ To this end, Morgulov has explained, "If talking about the US strategic initiatives in Asia, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) or the Indo-Pacific strategy, their objectives are obvious—driving a wedge between the region's biggest country China and the rest of Asia."⁵ Meanwhile, Russia holds that it is neither seen as a rival of the US, nor taken as a potential regional cooperation partner. Despite the fact that Russia keeps very close relations with China, the US still believes its role in the region is marginal. It can be seen that Russia feels a little uncomfortable, or even slightly frustrated, with its marginal presence in the US' Indo-Pacific strategy.

¹ Колдунова Е.В., ЮГО-ВОСТОЧНАЯ АЗИЯ ПЕРЕД ВЫЗОВАМИ ИНДО-ТИХООКЕАНСКИХ КОНЦЕПЦИЙ, ЮГО-ВОСТОЧНАЯ АЗИЯ: АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ РАЗВИТИЯ Том I, № 2 (43), 2019.

² Андрей Кортунов, "Индो-Пацифика или Сообщество единой судьбы?," accessed December 21, 2019, <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/indo-patsifika-ili-soobshchestvo-edinoy-sudby/>.

³ "Политика США В Индо-тихоокеанском Регионе: Последствия для России."

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "Преодолеть себя, взглянуть на мир через незападную оптику," accessed December 21, 2019, <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/events/posts/articles/chez-nezapadnuyu-optiku/>.

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Impacts of the Indo-Pacific Strategy on Russia's Pivot to the East

In the early days after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, as Russia focused on developing relations with the West and restoring its influence within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Asia-Pacific region essentially became a vacuum for Russian diplomacy. Although Putin pursued a well-rounded foreign policy after coming to power in 2000, it was not until the start of the global financial crisis in 2008 and the resulting shift of the global development center toward the Asia-Pacific that Russian elites truly realized the urgency of revitalizing the Far East and strengthening its Asia-Pacific policy. In 2012, the government of the Russian Federation specifically established a ministry for the development of the Far East. In the same year, Russia's Far East city of Vladivostok successfully hosted an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit. In the wake of the Ukraine crisis in 2014, and in the face of a declining domestic economy and soured relations with the West, sustaining the revitalization and growth of the Far East, attracting investment from the Asian-Pacific countries, and broadening the trade and energy market in the region have increasingly become necessary strategies for Russia in order to break through its diplomatic encirclement. In recent years, Russia has continued its diplomatic efforts in the Asia-Pacific region, not only by pragmatically promoting the development of its Far East region, but also earnestly seeking to diversify its Asia-Pacific partners and expand their agendas, thus forming the strong policy of pivoting to the East.

Pivot to the East is a further developed continuation of Russia's Asia-Pacific diplomacy under new historical conditions, which has been implemented as a result of external stimulation and provocations. As a result, it is extremely sensitive to external conditions. As Russian elites and scholars see it, the Asia-Pacific that serves Russia's strategic interests and is conducive to its eastward shift should meet several conditions. First, sustained economic prosperity, which will provide not only the massive amount of capital, technology and labor necessary for the development of the Far East under the circumstance that Russia is in a state of financial distress, but also a vast market for its exports. Second, no major security threats, which will ensure peace and stability on

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Russia's eastern borders. As a Russian diplomat once pointed out, an important starting point for Russia in formulating its Asia-Pacific policy is that there are no direct threats to its national security interests in the region. Third, respect the centrality of ASEAN in addressing security issues in the Asia-Pacific. Russia has made a particular emphasis on the indivisibility of Asia-Pacific security and has always been in support of building an inclusive security mechanism centering around ASEAN in the Asia-Pacific. The Foreign Policy Conception of the Russian Federation, issued in 2016, asserted Russia is striving to strengthen long-term comprehensive partnership and dialog with ASEAN to elevate this relationship to the level of strategic partnership. Russia is also committed to participating in such events as the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN regional Security Forum, and the meetings for defense executives of ASEAN countries and dialog partners.¹ Fourth, strong energy demands and dependency on Russia. As a traditional exporter of energy resources, Russia has not yet become a key factor in the energy balancing of the Asia-Pacific region. Given the estranged relationship between Russia and Europe regarding their energy relations, it has increasingly become a priority in Russia's energy policy to expand its exports in the Asia-Pacific and to diversify export routes. Fifth, diversified global development. Russia holds that the Asia-Pacific is not yet "Westernized", and the regional order in the Asia-Pacific could likely evolve into a new global system, in which Russia may play an important role.²

It is clear to see that although the US has no intention of challenging or even ignoring Russia's interests in the Asia-Pacific, its Indo-Pacific strategy is colliding with Russia's Pivot to the East strategy in this vast region, which will inevitably exert certain negative impacts on Russia's agenda. In this regard, a report from the Russian Foreign Affairs Committee pointed out three major risks. First, an unrelenting US policy will lead to an increasingly militarized region, which will not only bring new risks to Russia's national security, but also increase its costs of ensuring national security in this region. Second, neglecting Moscow means the US is ignoring Russia's interests and wishes

¹ "The Russian Federation's Foreign Policy Vision for 2016," accessed November 24, 2019, http://cn.mid.ru/foreign_policy/founding_document/302.

² Maxim Bratersky, "Russia's Pivot to Asia: Situational Interest or Strategic Necessity?," *Asia Politics & Policy*, Vol.10, No. 4 (2018) , 585.

to build a regional structure without Russia's input in the decision-making of the Indo-Pacific agenda. In this respect, even if the US causes no practical difficulties to Moscow's policies, it contradicts Russia's political aspirations. Third, in a more pragmatic sense, American endeavors to polarize the region and strengthen its alliances may undermine Russia's political and economic interests. In recent years, Russia has constantly strengthened its comprehensive strategic coordination and cooperation with China, continued its long-standing partnerships with India and Vietnam, and consolidated its cooperation with South Korea, Japan and ASEAN. If Russia is forced to choose sides in a polarized region, it will be deprived of its positive relations and interactions with these countries.¹ In addition, Anton Tsvetov, a scholar from the Russian Center for Strategic Studies, revealed another of Russia's ambitions: the new concept of Indo-Pacific is being introduced at a time when Russia is attempting to utilize its dominance in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) to bring it into the Asian market. Furthermore, it is actively coordinating and synergizing with the BRI proposed by China, as Russia is eager for its Greater Eurasian Partnership Initiative to draw Eurasian countries closer to the north, in contrast to the US Indo-Pacific concept, which is trying to draw countries in the region southward to the Indian Ocean.² This may also be one of the reasons why Russia is highly concerned and vigilant about this strategy.

However, Russia has also sensed its limited opportunities brought about by America's pursuit of the Indo-Pacific strategy. On the whole, although Russia believes the trend of polarization is inevitable, it is by no means irreversible. Moreover, even if China-US confrontation continues to divide the Asia-Pacific region, there is still a long way to go between Russia's interests and the forefront of the China-US rivalry, which will offer more space for Russia to maneuver and manage its diplomatic presence in the region.

Firstly, the Indo-Pacific strategy may revitalize Russia's Far East. Although the region's development has made certain progress since 2014, it is far from

¹ "Политика США В Индо-тихоокеанском Регионе: Последствия для России."

² Антон Цветов, "Индо-Тихоокеанский фронт: зачем на геополитической карте появился новый регион и что это сулит России?," accessed December 1, 2019, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/75706>.

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fundamentally transforming the basic reality of the backward social and economic conditions that exists there. Theoretically, the Indo-Pacific countries account for 60 percent of the global GDP; the growth in the demand for energy and raw materials in this region will be about 60 percent of the world's total by 2040; and the investment needs of the Indo-Pacific countries will exceed \$1 trillion.¹ Russian experts pointed out that the Indo-Pacific is an opportunity for Russia's Far East to move into the future; it is the gateway to the oriental world for the entire Eurasia land mass, while also the entry point for Arctic resources to flow into the Indo-Pacific; and it is an intersection of both land and sea as well as the greater Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific, which is unique in geopolitics and offers a new impetus for the development of the region.² In addition, the development of the Indo-Pacific concept may shift the focus of Eurasian countries' economic development from north to south, a process in which Russia can consolidate its role as a supplier of raw materials.³

Secondly, Russia may be able to take advantage of the obstacles facing the US in implementing its Indo-Pacific strategy, which depends on the full participation of Japan, India, Australia, and some other relevant countries. However, the countries presently involved are far from reaching a high degree of consensus in their understanding of the strategic intentions of the United States, nor its means of implementation. Russian scholars are keen to point out, the Indo-Pacific strategy is still evolving, and Russia is just standing back and pretending it does not exist. On the contrary, Russia should leverage this concept and try to benefit from it.⁴ Russia should seize the opportunity to shape its unique position in the region, continue to take advantage of its "invisibility" in the eyes of the US, and further develop diversified partnerships to ease the sense of insecurity throughout the Southeast Asian countries in the face of the

¹ "Индия зовёт Россию в Индо -Тихоокеанский регион," accessed July 22, 2020, <http://politanalyse.com/2020/07/24/indiya-zovyot-rossiyu-v-indo-tixookeanskij-region/>.

² "India, Russia and the Indo-Pacific," accessed July 26, 2020, <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/the-indo-pacific-region-and-russia/>.

³ "Индия зовёт Россию в Индо-Тихоокеанский регион."

⁴ "Индо-Тихоокеанский регион: терминологический трюк или новые возможности для России?."

rivalry between China and the United States.¹ It is important not to miss this opportunity and to get ready to cooperate with the Northeast, Southeast and South Asian countries in any form.²

Thirdly, America's focus on the Indo-Pacific will dilute its energies in Northeast Asia, Europe and certain former Soviet countries, while the latter is of greater significance to Russia in terms of geopolitics and economy. Russia's security interests in East Asia are concentrated on coordinating the Korean nuclear issue and resolving territorial disputes with Japan in order to ensure enduring, stable and effective security along its eastern border. In terms of border security, the southward movement of the China-US rivalry battlefield is beneficial for Russia. In other words, if the Indo-Pacific becomes the major arena for China-US tensions to play out, Russia's doorstep will be more secure. Therefore, as a Russian specialist pointed out, "In the European direction, Russia remains the main target of US containment, while in the Indo-Pacific such a role has been given to China. Although the US has the resources to act aggressively in more than one place at a time, its concentration on the Asia-Pacific is what Russia prefers to see."³

Russia's Response to the Indo-Pacific Strategy

After carefully assessing its unique geopolitical and national interests, Russia's sense of loss and anxiety over America's Indo-Pacific strategy has eased. While considering the risks, Russia is becoming increasingly grateful that it is not the major target of American containment in the region. Therefore, it is not only glad to see that it can bide its time and carefully watch how the tussle between China and the US plays out in the Asia-Pacific region, but also pleased to see the US lacks the energy to stir up trouble elsewhere. These judgment calls made by Russia have resulted in its complex and multifaceted response to the Indo-Pacific strategy pursued by the United States.

¹ Ibid.

² "India, Russia and the Indo-Pacific," accessed July 6, 2020, <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/the-indo-pacific-region-and-russia/>.

³ "Политика США В Ииндо-тихоокеанском Регионе: Последствия для России."

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In terms of the concept, Russia openly resists using the term Indo-Pacific, rather it still adheres to the term Asia-Pacific in its official documents and statements. As Lavrov asserted, there is no such concept as the Indo-Pacific in Russia. So, it is only political terminology.¹ The Russian *Kommersant* also expressed, Asia-Pacific is the concept Russia supports. Russia believes itself to be a part of the Asia-Pacific region, while the concept of Indo-Pacific is fabricated by man, which is intended to bring disparity into the region.² As Kupriyanov further pointed out, Russian officials and experts prefer to operate within the framework of their customary terminology, partially because they do not want to irritate their Chinese partner unnecessarily, and partially because they suspect American conspiracy and worry that the concept of Indo-Pacific is aggressive.³ Some research conducted by Western scholars also confirms this point. A report published by the Lowy Institute, a well-known Australian think-tank, claimed that before going into detail about Russia's policy toward the Asia-Pacific region, one has to deal with its naming first. Russia has explicitly used the term Asia-Pacific, particularly so under the current circumstances. This report further pointed out, for Moscow, the importance of the China-Russia partnership makes it imperative for the nation to avoid unwarranted offences against China or attempts to contain it. In such context, language matters, as Russia is far more interested in the Asia-Pacific than in the Indian Ocean or the Indian subcontinent.⁴

In terms of orientation, Russia has a rational view on its role and position in the region. Foreign policy is often an external reflection of a country's national identity. In Russia's thousand years of history, its national identity

¹ “Тонкие красные «клинья» ,” accessed November 21, 2019, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3894781>.

² “Тонкие красные «клинья» ,” accessed November 21, 2019, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3894781>.

³ “Индо-Тихоокеанский регион: терминологический трюк или новые возможности для России?,” accessed October 3, 2020, <http://geo-politica.info/indo-tikhookeanskiy-region-terminologicheskiy-tryuk-ili-novye-vozmozhnosti-dlya-rossii.html>.

⁴ “Once More with Feeling: Russia and the Asia-Pacific,” accessed December 21, 2019, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/once-more-feeling-russia-and-asia-pacific#_edn3.

has always been a matter of vital importance to the destiny of the country. For centuries, the Russian ideological circle has undergone great debates among the Western, Slavic and Eurasian schools based on summarizing the unique historical processes, religious culture and surrounding environment of Russia, in which its oriental genes have been reflected and strengthened. However, the core of Russia's industry, economy and civilization, in an objective sense, has always been in its European part. So, it is quite reasonable to say that the trend toward "Westernization" has been the mainstream in Russian history, as "Russia has always sought to merge with Western Europe."¹ Since the Ukraine crisis in 2014, the impasse in the relations between Russia and the West has been difficult to reverse, hence giving rise to a renewed debate in Russia about its Eurasian identity. The Russian elites, gradually abandoning their unrealistic illusions about the West, have come to the conclusion that Russia's traditional European orientation should be linked closely to its natural interests in Asia. Putin also said on several occasions that merging with the Asia-Pacific should be the priority in Russia's current national strategy. A Russian scholar pointed out, Russia has positioned itself as the future "corridor" between the Asia-Pacific and Europe, while wishing to become a major energy and agro-products supplier to Asian countries.² Nonetheless, Russia has been clear that it is not a major player in the Asia-Pacific region. Particularly in the context of growing tension between China and the US in recent years, Russia has reached the conclusion that the changing order in the Asia-Pacific means that the countries in the region see the US as a vital player to regional security, while not viewing Russia as a stakeholder.³ Dmitri Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, admitted that Russia is neither the "west of the East", nor the "east of

¹ Feng Yujun, "Why the West Excludes Russia: Historical and Cultural Conundrum of Russia's Integration into the West," accessed May 30, 2018, <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper68/7120/688857.html>.

² Alexey D. Muraviev, "Understanding Russia's Strategic Engagement with the Indo-Asia-Pacific," accessed August 1, 2020, <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/understanding-russia%E2%80%99s-strategic-engagement-the-indo-asia-pacific>.

³ "Воссоединение Хартленда: геополитическая химера или исторический шанс?," accessed August 5, 2020, <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/vossoedinenie-khartlenda-geopoliticheskaya-khimera-ili-istoricheskiy-shans/>.

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the West”; neither the “bridge of European and Asian civilizations”, nor the “geographical center of greater Eurasia.”¹ A report published by the Russian International Affairs Committee pointed out, not under any circumstances is Russia’s role decisive in consolidating the Eurasian heartland.² That is to say, a rational positioning of Russia in the Asia-Pacific region is the basis for it to pursue a flexible and pragmatic policy.

In terms of ideology, Russia has continued to promote its own strategic conception—the Greater Eurasian Partnership. As already being “late to the game” in the contest for Indo-Pacific, Russia, as suggested by some Russian scholars, should not act rashly, but rather adapt itself to the notions of others and find a suitable position for itself.³ In fact, Russia has been earnestly promoting a series of integration organizations in Eurasia since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, such as the CIS, the Russia-Belarus Union, the Eurasian Customs Union, the Eurasian Union, and the EEU, in addition to the joint construction of a “harmonious economic community stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok” with the European Union, which had also been a dream of the Russian elites. In June 2016, at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, Putin revealed the Russian version of Eurasian integration—the Greater Eurasian Partnership Initiative.⁴ Of late, this scheme has made a series of advances: in 2015, China and Russia signed the Joint Statement on Cooperation Synergy of the Building of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Building of the Eurasian Economic Union; in the same year, the EEU officially concluded a free trade agreement with Vietnam; in May 2018, China and the EEU formally signed an Agreement on Economic and Trade Cooperation; and in September 2019, Singapore became the second Southeast Asian country to sign a free trade

¹ Контурная карта российской геополитики: возможная стратегия Москвы в Большой Евразии, accessed October 17, 2020, <https://carnegie.ru/2019/02/11/ru-pub-78328>.

² “Политика США В Индо-тихоокеанском Регионе: Последствия для России.”

³ “India, Russia and the Indo-Pacific,” accessed July 26, 2020.

⁴ Putin pointed out the participants of this initiative included members of the EEU and some countries having close ties with Russia, such as China, India, Pakistan, and Iran. Of course, it also included the Commonwealth of Independent States and other interested countries and organizations.

agreement with the EEU. The EEU has also concluded various cooperation agreements with Indonesia, among others, while countries like Brunei, Cambodia and the Philippines have expressed interest in such cooperation. In November 2019, when attending the EAS, Russian Prime Minister Medvedev said that in the future the Greater Eurasian Partnership Initiative will synergize the major infrastructural projects and integration programs of the EEU, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and ASEAN, while Russia has been advocating for the building of this partnership with participation of member countries from these international organizations. A Russian scholar pointed out, once the project becomes successful, Moscow will occupy a key position at the intersection of civilizations, which will not only ensure trade and connectivity among Asian and European countries, but also act as a bridge that connects different cultures.¹ After the US introduced the Indo-Pacific strategy, Russian scholars pointed out that the concept has connected the geographical space from Vladivostok, Hanoi, Chennai, Petropavlovsk and Singapore to Bangalore,² and even proposes to build a diplomatic axis centered on India and ASEAN that extends from Vladivostok to Chennai.³ Obviously, Russia is neither prepared to embrace the Indo-Pacific strategy, nor willing to confront it, but would rather hedge against, accommodate and dilute it with the broader and more nebulous concept of Greater Eurasian Partnership so as to achieve its strategic objectives of avoiding risks, seizing opportunities and not being reduced to a supporting role. Just as Kupriyanov deftly put it, similar to ASEAN, Northeast Asian countries and India, Russia is also interested in a free, open and non-confrontational Indo-Pacific, as the Indo-Pacific strategy complements the Greater Eurasian Partnership rather than opposing it.⁴

In terms of practice, Russia has been keen on consolidating and

¹ “Russian Media Article: Russia Is Building a ‘Political Giant’ against the US in Eurasia,” accessed December 22, 2019, <http://column.cankaoxiaoxi.com/2019/0715/2385422.shtml>.

² “Индо-Тихоокеанский регион: терминологический трюк или новые возможности для России?”

³ Alexei Kupriyanov, “The Indo-Pacific Region and Russia,” accessed July 26, 2020, <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/the-indo-pacific-region-and-russia/>.

⁴ “Индо-Тихоокеанский регион: терминологический трюк или новые возможности для России?”

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strengthening a series of bilateral relations. In addition to boosting its comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination with China, Russia continues to promote pragmatic bilateral cooperation with its traditional ally—India. To attain economic benefits, Russia is planning to increase bilateral trade to US\$30 billion before 2025, strengthen road transportation and infrastructural cooperation, establish a five-year roadmap for energy cooperation, invite India to participate in the Far East LNG and Arctic LNG-2 projects, and help it construct its nuclear power stations. Meanwhile, Russia has actively responded to India's demands for strategic independence and intentionally elevates India's status as a major-country against the backdrop of the Indo-Pacific strategy in order to indirectly exert influence in the region. In 2017, Russia urged India to join the SCO; in 2019, Russia signed an arms export agreement worth US\$10 billion with India; and the two countries are currently developing a plan for military technology cooperation before 2030 and decided to establish a military complex. During 2020, in the context of the widespread COVID-19 pandemic and the intensifying confrontation between China and the US, Russia and India have become more strategically engaged. Putin has had several telephone conversations with Prime Minister Modi of India, confirming his visit to the subcontinent before the end of 2020. At the end of June, the Indian defense minister visited Russia, urging it to step up the production schedule of the S-400 long-range air defense missile systems, and urgently submitting a list of arms worth over US\$1 billion to purchase from Russia. At a web conference among Russian and Indian scholars, both sides pointed out that the China-US confrontation put Russia and India in an “advantageous and dangerous” position, which called for their coordination and expansion of cooperation. As neither country wants to be caught up in the competition and rivalry of other countries, Russia and India are likely to become leaders of a new non-aligned movement.¹ With regard to Vietnam, Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc visited Russia and attended the opening ceremony of the Russia-Vietnam Year in May 2019, when the two countries signed several agreements

¹ “Россия и Индия: не попасть в жернова чужого соперничества,” accessed August 3, 2020, <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/events/posts/articles/rossiya-i-indiya-ne-popast-v-zhernova-chuzhogo-sopernichestva/>.

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for economic cooperation. In May 2020, Russian Railway announced that it would soon start a scheduled connecting train from Russia to Vietnam's Anyuan station via China. With respect to the DPRK, DPRK leader Kim Jong-un made his first visit to Russia in April 2019 when he held the first Russia-DPRK summit since 2011 with Putin in Vladivostok after US-DPRK talks stalled. In 2020, Russia successively provided the DPRK with 15,000 COVID-19 virus detection kits and 50,000 tons of free wheat assistance. With regards to South Korea, Russia and South Korea have started talks on a free trade agreement and signed an agreement for cooperation with South Korea's "Nine-Bridge Strategy" to strengthen cooperation in ship-building, port developing and Arctic shipping routes as well as natural gas, railway, electric power, employment, agriculture and aquatic production. Concerning ASEAN, former Russian Prime Minister Medvedev attended the 14th East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Business Forum in November 2019 in the wake of the success of the Russia-ASEAN Summit held in Sochi, Russia in 2016 and Putin's first visit to Singapore to attend the 13th East Asia Summit in 2018. He suggested Russia hold joint naval exercises with ASEAN to improve its maritime security and stressed that the establishment of an equal and unified security framework in the Asia-Pacific region is one of the most important directions for bilateral cooperation. Since 2015, Vladivostok has hosted the Eastern Economic Forum for five consecutive years, which Putin attends in person to promote and attract investment, while leaders from all over the Asia-Pacific region come to pay tribute. Continually upgrading its size, this forum has increasingly served as a calling card for Russia's development of its Far East and integration into the Asia-Pacific region.

Although not having officially introduced a coherent policy toward the Indo-Pacific region, Russia as a major country with a long tradition of "bigger diplomacy" is obviously not satisfied with being a bystander, as it is making full use of and expanding its resources, while engaging in interaction, competition and political gaming among countries in the Indo-Pacific region in a flexible and pragmatic manner and by combining virtuality with reality in order to strive for a neighborly environment, attain practical benefits, elevate influence, and lay out its strategic vision of Greater Eurasian Partnership.

Prospects for Russia's Management of the Indo-Pacific Situation

It should be acknowledged that the Indo-Pacific strategy of the US is currently still in its early stages of integration and implementation. However, this strategy as well as its regional and international consequences have increasingly provided the context for Russia to advance its Pivot to the East policy, while coping with the Indo-Pacific strategy has also become an increasingly important agenda for Russia in the Asia-Pacific region. As Russia and the US are not regional rivals of the same magnitude, coupled with various negative factors at home and abroad, Russia will inevitably face many restraints in the implementation of its policy. Nevertheless, it is certain that Russia will adhere to its unique principles of Asia-Pacific diplomacy while displaying its diplomatic wisdom and skills to maximize strategic benefits.

I. Russia will inevitably face many obstacles while managing the Indo-Pacific situation to its advantage. From the overall international environment, the main factor that will affect the future of the situation of the region is still the direction of China-US relations. Presently, the overall situation in the Asia-Pacific, as the main battleground of the game between China and the United States, is becoming grim, as the existing order is constantly being eroded and many of the regional countries have to face the dilemma of taking sides politically and militarily. Although Russia is adept at political maneuvering, once a serious conflict or crisis breaks out in the region, its geopolitical, economic and security interests will be inevitably affected. What is more, Russia is only a second-tier player in the Asia-Pacific region without the strength and resources to have major influence and turn the tide. Moreover, the trade war between China and the US has had negative impacts on the overall trade environment in the Asia-Pacific, which also poses certain challenges to Russia's efforts to promote the export of its resources and commodities.

From inside Russia, the development of its Far East region, as the springboard and bridgehead to the Asia-Pacific, is a long-term and arduous plan. Some achievements have been made in the development of the Far East with the introduction of some favorable policies in recent years, such as free land leasing and the construction of free ports and advanced economic development

zones, although they are still at an early stage in a new round of development. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a series of problems for the development of the region including the shortage of funds. In addition, as Russia's Far East region has suffered a steady decline in population, many people in the region are not interested in some of these policies with few people applying for the free land leases, nor has the goal of attracting the western population to the region been very successful. In 2018, due to migration and natural population decrease (although mortality has not increased, the birth rate is declining), the population in Russia's Far East is 2.1 percent lower than that in 2010. These factors have made the development of the region an arduous task, which have also resulted in the lack of necessary prerequisites for Russia to further its Pivot to the East policy.

Most importantly, the issue of national identity has always perplexed the Russian elites. Although Russia is becoming increasingly dependent on the Asian market (particularly China's), its security and diplomatic concerns as well as political and military influence are heavily concentrated in the western part of Eurasia. Economically, Russia has always craved money and technology from the US and Europe. Russia is not a dominant force in the economic activities of the Asia-Pacific and for a long time it was almost entirely isolated from them economically. In 2018, Russia's trade with ASEAN was less than US\$20 billion.¹ Presently, Singapore's trade with the EEU is only US\$6.5 billion. As a result, whether it is because of religion, history and culture or economic connections, Russia cannot internalize its Asian identity, let alone become a natural member of the Asia-Pacific.² Meanwhile, Asian-Pacific countries also lack a strong sense of shared identity with Russia as an "oriental country" and are accustomed to seeing Russia as an "outsider". When discussing Asia-Pacific affairs, they often tend to talk about Russia in passing. Although Russia is enthusiastic about the DPRK issue and other affairs on the peninsula, it plays only a secondary role. Furthermore, in some ways Russia's worsened relations

¹ "The EEU May Be Upgraded Again as Russia Has Proposed the Vision of a 'Greater Eurasian Partnership'," accessed December 18, 2019, http://www.dragonnewsru.com/home/headlines_home/20191104/100258.html.

² Feng Shuai, "Russia's Position and Role in the Asia-Pacific Security System," *Contemporary International Relations*, No. 2 (2010), 20.

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with the West also objectively obstruct the development of its relations with Japan and South Korea.

II. Russia will continue to adhere to its unique narrative of Asia-Pacific diplomacy. The well-known British thinker Isaiah Berlin once said about Russia, "One of the most striking features of modern Russian culture is that it has a very strong sense of self."¹ This strong sense of self is fully manifested in its diplomatic thought and practice. Although the sudden introduction of the Indo-Pacific strategy by the US has stirred the situation of major power competition in the Asia-Pacific, Russia has always adhered to a few basic principles of its Pivot to the East strategy from the consideration of its geopolitical and national interests.

First, Russia pursues its Asia-Pacific policy as an important part of building its Greater Eurasian Partnership. Considering that its deteriorated relations with the West cannot be reversed in the short term, Russia will continue to attach great importance to the Asia-Pacific, a vibrant region with strong geopolitical and security values, constantly consolidate the benefits it gains, and explore new directions for cooperation. This is not just a practical need for its Pivot to the East strategy, but also an ambition to dominate the process of Eurasian integration in competition with the BRI, the Indo-Pacific strategy and other policies, with the ultimate goal of building an independent pole as a great Eurasian power in the context of significant changes in the world and a new cold war between China and the United States.

Second, Russia is committed to diversifying its partnerships rather than relying too much on China. The intimate China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination is the cornerstone of Russia's Asia-Pacific diplomacy. Meanwhile, Russia has made it clear that it is imperative to actively prompt Japan, South Korea, ASEAN, and even the United States and European countries to participate in the development of its Far East region in order to attract foreign capital to the maximum extent possible. As some Russian scholars have pointed out, although China is Russia's main strategic partner, Japan and South Korea not only have important positions in its external

¹ Isaiah Berlin, *The Soviet Mind: Russian Culture under Communism*, Yilin Press (2010), 124.

economic activities, but also in a sense counterbalance China's growing influence.¹

Third, Russia will work to develop transport routes that span both east and west as well as north and south. Russia stretches across the Eurasian land mass, not only facing three oceans, but also bordering the EU in the west, Japan in the east, as well as Turkey and Iran in the south. However, the major transportation routes within the Eurasian land mass are located south of Russian territory. As the Russian strategic community has always held "panoramic views", special attention has been rendered to achieving transportation stability and balance in both east-west and north-south directions when planning connectivity projects on the Eurasian continent. Of late, while modernizing its trans-Siberia and Baikal-Amur railway lines in the east-west direction, Russia has also been actively promoting the export of resources and energy through its Far Eastern ports to the Pacific and Indian Oceans, exploring Arctic shipping routes, and strongly advocating the construction of a north-south international transportation corridor that goes through Russia, Iran and Azerbaijan, all of which are intended to open up a north-south flow of traffic.

Fourth, Russia will promote multilateralism bilaterally. From its current diplomatic practices, Russia will continue to take consolidating the comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination with China as a major pillar for its Asia-Pacific policy, strengthen its traditional alliances as well as energy and military ties with India, Vietnam and Mongolia, develop contacts with Japan, South Korea and Singapore to promote more investment and better trade relations, and intervene in the geopolitical situation in Northeast Asia by becoming more actively involved in DPRK affairs, all of which are meant to further its Pivot to the East strategy. Vasily Mikheev, a member of Russia's Academy of Science and director of the Asia-Pacific Center under the Institute for World Economics and International Relations, pointed out that the multilateral format has little chance for success in the Asia-Pacific under the current circumstances. In the short term, countries in the Asia-Pacific will

¹ "АТР и Россия: ближайшие перспективы," accessed September 11, 2020, <https://www.imemo.ru/special-rubrics/pacific-asia-in-focus/text/atr-i-rossiya-blizhayshe-perspektivi>.

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strive to maintain bilateral relations, try to prevent adverse external factors from intervening in domestic affairs, and actively enhance internal vitality and influence.¹

III. Russia will display the highest level of opportunism in the Asia-Pacific region. As a matter of fact, the tendency of opportunism and pragmatism in Russia's Asia-Pacific diplomacy has long been reflected. On the one hand, Russia is not willing to miss the opportunity to take advantage of Asia-Pacific economic growth, as the neglect of this region was one of the recent strategic blunders of the Russian elites. In retrospect of the first decade of the 21st century, Sergei Karaganov, chairman of the Russian Council for Foreign Affairs and Defense, sharply pointed out, Russia was smug about the economic boom that followed the oil price spike. As a result, its Far East region failed to take advantage of the economic take-off of the Asia-Pacific region to achieve rapid development and merge into the economic integration process. It was very unfortunate, as "missing an opportunity is no less than committing a mistake." On the other hand, Russia will accelerate its Pivot to the East strategy as it knows far too well that its deteriorated relations with the West can hardly be reversed in the short term. For six years, although Russia's Pivot to the East policy has made some headways, it still faces multiple obstacles. Fundamentally, it will take time to prove whether this policy is intended as leverage against the West or a means for self-development, whether to show complete disappointment to the US and Europe or just to display some temporary coldness, and whether it is a makeshift policy against certain geopolitical risks or a long-term strategy for Russia's stable development in the future.

Since the US stepped up its implementation of the Indo-Pacific strategy, the opportunism of Russia's Asia-Pacific diplomacy has been more perceptive. Firstly, ambivalence in responding to the strategy, as Russia rejoices that it is not the main force confronting the US so it can take its time watching the major powers "tiger fight" play out, but at the same time it is not willing to be completely left out of the picture and wants to get more actively involved. Secondly, being multifaceted in diplomatic practice. On the one hand, Russian

¹ Ibid.

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officials have publicly repeated their criticism and opposition against the Indo-Pacific strategy, while Russian media has cooperated in exposing the schemes of the US and its allies to contain China and play up regional tension. On the other hand, Russian academics have stepped up their efforts to assess the potential opportunities for Russia during a time of great changes. Well-known Russian scholars, such as Karaganov and Trenin, have pointed out, conflict between China and the US means more of an opportunity than a threat to Russia.¹ Thirdly, soberness and rationality in the face of chaos. Based on an objective assessment of the international environment and its own national strength and interests, Russia has always sought to make rational choices when defining advantages and disadvantages as well as when determining what to give up and what to pursue amid chaos. As the Russian International Affairs Committee pointed out, what Russia needs to do is to correctly assess its true position in the US' strategy in various fields, not only to fully assess the possible threats posed by the Indo-Pacific strategy, but also not to overstate the potential confrontation between Russia and the US in the region, with the aim of avoiding risks and the misallocation of resources. As it is seen, Russia's recognition and assessment of as well as response to the Indo-Pacific strategy pursued by the United States fully demonstrate the wisdom and skill of Russia's major-country diplomacy, which always puts national interests first, has clear goals, and is flexible and pragmatic.

(edited by Zhao Jinfu)

¹ “Биполярность или баланс?,” accessed September 18, 2020, <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/bipolarnost-balans/>.