

RESHAPING REGIONAL RELATIONS

**Asia-Pacific
and the
Former Soviet Union**

edited by
RAMESH THAKUR
and
CARLYLE A. THAYER

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Reshaping Regional Relations

Asia-Pacific and
the Former Soviet Union

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Ramesh Thakur
and Carlyle A. Thayer

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Reshaping Regional Relations

Glossary

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFTA	Asean Free Trade Area
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
CGDK	Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CMEA	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
EAEC	East Asian Economic Caucus
EC	European Community
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organisation
<i>FEER</i>	<i>Far Eastern Economic Review</i>
FPDA	Five Power Defence Arrangements
FSU	Former Soviet Union
G-7	Group of Seven industrial states
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
IAF	Indian Air Force
ICBM	Intercontinental ballistic missile
ICO	Islamic Conference Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KPNLF	Khmer People's National Liberation Front
KPRP	Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party
LPRP	Lao People's Revolutionary Party
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan)
MTCR	Missile Technology Control Regime
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NAM	Nonaligned Movement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NIC	Newly industrialising country
NLF	National Liberation Front
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
NWFZ	Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PDPA	People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan
PECC	Pacific Economic Cooperation Conference
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
SAARC	South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation
SCMP	<i>South China Morning Post</i>
SEATO	South-East Asia Treaty Organisation
SLBM	Submarine-launched ballistic missile
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
SWB	<i>Summary of World Broadcasts</i>
TRADP	Tumen River Area Development Program
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
U.S.	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (the former Soviet Union)
ZOPFAN	Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality

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Asia-Pacific After the Cold War

Ramesh Thakur

By history and geopolitics, Russia is a bridge between West and East. In a major foreign policy speech at Vladivostok on 28 July 1986, Mikhail Gorbachev located the Soviet Union firmly as an Asian-Pacific power, tried to define a new Soviet role in the region and launched a fresh approach to the problems of regional security and the Soviet Union's bilateral relations with Asian neighbours.¹ The theme was repeated in the much-publicised interview with *Merdeka*, the Indonesian newspaper, in July 1987, and again in another notable speech at Krasnoyarsk in September 1988. Gorbachev is no longer in power, having resigned on Christmas day 1991; the Soviet Union is no longer in existence, having broken up formally one day later. The momentous developments in world affairs pose important questions for the "mode of articulation" between Asia and the former Soviet Union (FSU). Will a four-power rectangle (China, Japan, Russia and the United States) provide a stable structure of Asian-Pacific order? Or will the events of the last few years focus Russian attention westwards?

At a roundtable discussion in Moscow on 26 November 1991, speakers noted that Moscow's international role was continuously shrinking and its positions won on global and regional issues were being progressively abandoned. Boris Zanegin of the Soviet Academy of Sciences said that the only direction of Russian foreign policy seemed to be "the search for donors and sponsors." Roald Lebedinskii of the foreign ministry proposed the convening of a conference of Russia and the Central Asian republics to

1. See Ramesh Thakur and Carlyle A. Thayer, eds., *The Soviet Union as an Asian Pacific Power: Implications of Gorbachev's 1986 Vladivostok Initiative* (Boulder and Melbourne: Westview and Macmillan, 1987).

work out a coordinated policy towards the Asian-Pacific region.² Speaking in Manila in July 1992, Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev said that "Russia remains a Pacific power."³ During a visit to Kamchatka too he noted that Russia's Eastern policy should be no less active than that directed towards the West.⁴ The purpose of this book is to explore the reality or verisimilitude and ramifications of this claim.

The Lead Players

A new world order for Asia-Pacific—the biggest and most diverse region in the world—is going to be a time-consuming enterprise. This is especially so because the ill-defined and inchoate concept of a new world order includes at least three distinct components. In the security sector, it is rooted in realism which views world order as the product of a stable distribution of power among the major actors. In this conception, aggressive behaviour is to be deterred and defeated by the great powers acting in concert on behalf of the world community. Its ideological component however draws inspiration from the liberalism of Woodrow Wilson and lays greater stress on the normative world order, expressed in particular in the promotion of democracy and human rights.⁵ The third component is economic, whereby stable democratic governments will underpin an open trade and investment regime.

The framework for the world order resting on superpower rivalry was adopted at Yalta in 1945. Reflecting the two theatres of the Second World War, that order had two geographical components: Europe and Asia-Pacific. Since about 1989, the Yalta-based order for Europe has crumbled, but not for Asia-Pacific. The structure of power relations in the region is more fluid and complex than in Europe, resting on at least four powers: the United States, China, Japan and Russia. India is a fifth possible contender. For the moment, however, India is wracked by political turmoil, social ferment and economic drift. In external relations, on the one hand the situation in the subcontinent is quite sobering. During the 1980s India developed a formidable military capability. Both India and Pakistan are threshold or basement nuclear powers. On the other hand the government of India under the prime ministership of P. V. Narasimha Rao concluded that the most

2. BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB)*, SU/1241 A3/1, 28 November 1991.

3. *Economist* (London), 25 July 1992, p. 25.

4. BBC, *SWB*, SU/1437 A1/4, 20 July 1992.

5. For a discussion of the conceptual tension between the realist and liberal antecedents of the new world order, see Joseph S. Nye, "What New World Order?" *Foreign Affairs* 71 (Spring 1992), pp. 83–96.

pressing priorities were economic liberalisation at home and friendship with the United States.⁶ Consequently India is not covered any further in this introductory survey of Asia-Pacific; the implications for India of the breakup of the Soviet Union are analysed in chapter 8.

The Former Soviet Union (FSU)

Communism in the Soviet Union was blown away in the storm of protests that swirled up after the abortive coup of August 1991. The Baltic republics gained swift recognition of their independence from Moscow and the outside world. The eventual shape of the rest of the erstwhile Soviet Union remains blurred. There are at least four different routes down which the ex-union could travel. It could survive on the European Community (EC) model as a common market, linked by a common, almost certainly fully convertible, currency. It is worth remembering that if we exclude Russia, then in the remaining 11 republics, more than 40 percent of the output is traded with the rest of the FSU. (For Russia the figure is only 15 percent, so it is well-placed to survive a breakup of the ex-Soviet market.)

TABLE 1.1: Indicators of the Republics of the Former Soviet Union, 1990

	Percentage share of former union's		Products		Wealth per capita (% of former union's average indicator)
	Population	GNP	Industry	Agriculture	
Armenia	1.1	1.3	0.8	0.6	82
Azerbaijan	2.5	1.4	1.7	1.8	64
Belarus	3.6	3.8	4.1	5.9	103
Estonia	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.9	140
Georgia	1.9	1.7	1.2	1.4	84
Kazakhstan	5.8	5.3	3.5	6.9	91
Kirgizstan	1.5	0.9	0.5	1.3	53
Latvia	0.9	1.2	0.8	1.4	122
Lithuania	1.3	1.6	1.2	2.2	108
Moldova	1.5	1.2	0.8	2.2	80
Russia	51.3	58.7	66.4	46.2	117
Tajikistan	1.8	0.9	0.4	1.0	40
Turkmenistan	1.2	0.9	0.4	1.1	67
Ukraine	18.0	16.5	16.0	22.5	93
Uzbekistan	7.0	4.0	1.7	4.6	50

SOURCE: *Foreign Trade* 11-12/1991, p. 50.

6. See Ramesh Thakur, "India After Nonalignment," *Foreign Affairs* 71 (Spring 1992), pp. 165-82.

Alternatively (or in addition), the remaining republics could follow the military model of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and stay together in an alliance with a unified command structure in charge of contingents contributed and controlled by each of the republics. Foreign policy would then be coordinated but not determined by the centre. As things have developed since the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), this seems unlikely.

Instead the republics could be reduced to an association of sovereign states linked by bonds no stronger than the Commonwealth of Nations that brings together former British colonies in a loose organisational umbrella: a talking shop, an excuse for a periodic junket of government leaders and an occasional get-together of athletes, and an organisation for disbursing a few scholarships.

Finally, the constituent republics of the CIS could also fall apart completely into almost 40 countries. The FSU had comprised 15 Republics, 20 Autonomous Republics, 8 Autonomous regions and 10 Autonomous Areas.

Russia

The collapse of communism and the disintegration of the Soviet-East European empire marked tectonic shifts in the world political landscape. The Soviet Union is dead; long live democratic Russia? Fateful questions are not usually met with simple and direct answers. Early euphoria soon gave way to gloom as tensions threatened relations between Russia and Ukraine over nuclear weapons and the Black Sea fleet, conflict erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan, a power struggle developed inside Georgia and Islam asserted itself in Central Asia.

In regard to communist ideology, analysts of later generations might debate whether the greater surprise was that it collapsed in the 1990s or that it lasted for more than 70 years in the Soviet Union. In power-political terms, the Soviet Union inherited the burden of an expansionist legacy from the Russian empire. In the words of the Russian historian Vassilii Kluchevskii, imperial Russia was "a bloated state of emaciated people."⁷ The Soviet empire stretched ever outwards in a ceaseless effort at warding off outside threats to its historical centre. Imperial overstretch however itself produced an implosion of the Soviet empire.

But will Russia be able to provide enlightened, civilised, democratic and stable leadership despite a gaping void in its own history? Boris Yeltsin is

7. Quoted in Andrei Kozyrev, "Russia: A Chance for Survival," *Foreign Affairs* 71 (Spring 1992), p. 2.

Russia's first-ever elected president. Democratic and market forces moved centre-stage in Moscow in 1991, but goodwill is not enough for building a civil society. The world moved to help as best it could for fear of the explosive consequences should a still-nuclear armed Russia lapse into closed totalitarianism. Yet by the anniversary of Boris Yeltsin's triumph in August 1991, his reform government seemed to be on the verge of collapse. The reverses in economic policy, the threat of dismissal hanging over the reform-minded Prime Minister Egor Gaidar, the failure to evolve democratic political institutions and the appointment of army hardliners to the top echelons of the military leadership were reminiscent of the desperate tilt to conservatism by Gorbachev in the autumn of 1990. What Boris Yeltsin has in his favour is popularity with his public at home.

Mikhail S. Gorbachev had goodwill abroad. The *Guardian Weekly* described him as "the most important man in the world."⁸ No living leader has so profoundly changed our lives as has Gorbachev. He transformed the Soviet Union, freed Eastern Europe, reunified Germany, ended forty years of the Cold War and nuclear confrontation between East and West, and he made sanity respectable again in relations between nations. Hence the description of his fall (or so it seemed on the morning after the coup) as not just a disaster for the USSR but "a tragedy of planetary proportions."⁹

The Soviet past burdened the new Russia also in the legacy of economic disaster. The Yeltsin government moved speedily to introduce a free-market economy, privatisation and liberalisation and, in foreign economic policy, to seek membership of or links with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the EC, the Group of Seven (G-7) industrial states and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). But clearly Russia has a long and difficult road to follow before goods, services, capital, people and ideas begin to move freely across political frontiers. By September 1992 there was some fear that the pace of reforms was slowing to a halt.

Efforts to promote civil society in Russia should be helped by the fact that the external environment is not hostile. To enmesh Russia still further in cooperative international exchanges, its leaders looked to deepen their involvement in such structures as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and the United Nations (UN). As the Gulf War showed, Gorbachev had already been moving to establish the old Soviet Union as a reliable partner in the community of civilised states. Under Yeltsin and Kozyrev, Russia has recommitted itself to establishing the UN as the centre for harmonising national, regional and global interests.

8. *Guardian Weekly*, 25 August 1991, p. 1.

9. *Ibid.*