

# Russia's Potential Pivot to the East Due to the Strains by the West Amid the Ukraine War

By Humsika Srikanth, Research Affiliate,  
Centre For East Asian Studies, Christ University, 20 November 2022



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## Introduction

“The Russians are turning east towards the Chinese, leaving the Europeans aghast. But the cohesion was bound to be fostered through sale of oil and gas rather than the erstwhile binding agents, Marx and Lenin,” stated Daniel Yergin (Yergin, 2021). This comment transcends sentimental biases and prejudices whilst underscoring the critical role trade partnerships play in realignment within International Relations.

Akin to Russia's Sino-centrism, which was unanticipated, we will explore in this paper if the country could extend its diplomatic foothold a notch further and towards other countries in the Asia Pacific since reorientation from the Western bloc is of worthy consideration for Moscow, whose invasion of Ukraine has placed it in dire straits and weakened ties with Europe and other counterparts to its left.

## **A Blank Astral Canvas**

The Asia-Pacific region is a burgeoning one that is rising rapidly in the global ranks of growth, however, it is rife with inter-state rivalry whilst perceiving the world through divergent ideological lenses. Despite the divisions among the Asia Pacific countries running deep, causing them to be unable to see eye to eye in many areas of concern, certain common grounds are held and requirements to be met. The region is yet to become a significant player in International Relations, aslo is militarily under-equipped compared to the West and encompasses unequal levels of economic prosperity (Lo, 2019). Considering the aforementioned, if Russia were to sink its tentacles into the Asia Pacific, it might be able to find common areas of cooperation, such as imparting its diplomatic expertise through training, supplying its top-shelf weaponry and selling cheap oil and gas to the region (Teslova, 2021).

To date, Russia has taken few initiatives towards the East, such as during Boris Yeltsin's regime, which was intent on developing a "full-scale foreign policy with varied vectors", with a bid to operate with both the hemispheres "holding equal awareness and enthusiasm", the plans of which were shelved before demonstration due to inept governance (Shuja, 1999). In 2010, the Kremlin under President Vladimir Putin entered into a commitment to Shift East (Povorot Na Vostok), which gradually resulted in a meaningful partnership with the Chinese through its Belt and Road initiative in 2013. It is said that Russia has been taking baby steps at building relations with the BRI countries ever since and has been trying to solve the socio-economic deficits of its own Eastern stretch and Siberia through the assistance provided by these countries whilst promising an investment of efforts in return. Having laid the groundwork, Moscow must now take advantage of development opportunities in the Asia Pacific and diversify its networking base (Smith, 2022). Still, its pivot to Asia policy comes with its own set of challenges, which must undergo structural adjustments and be dealt with practicality and sensitivity for a lasting partnership.

## **Can the Sun rising in the East brighten Moscow's dark moment?**

The international climate that Russia presently sits in due to its invasion of Ukraine is hostile and characterized by heavy sanctions, which, once imposed, take several years to be lifted.

Moreover, the country no longer reserves its right to exercise its political, economic, diplomatic and security privileges or enjoys concessions from its former allies. Due to the unfavourable circumstances, it is only prudent that Russia extends its reach and moves towards new frontiers in an effort to regain its pre-war status. As the US has been making headway in the Asia Pacific region through its naval deployments, trade partnerships and joint military drills with Japan and South Korea, Russia might also find a reason to counterbalance American influence in the region, thereby hitting two birds with one stone (Hunt, 2021). However, the hurdles unfurl in the form of China, which might not want Russia to dilute its hegemonic voice in the region, therefore consigning Russia to act to its bidding whilst still permitting the country to gain from the region's vast spread of resources (Tselichtchev, 2011).

With Beijing's bold declaration that western sanctions do not warrant its compliance, it is plausible that Russia moves in lockstep with China in order to venture into new markets in the Asia Pacific with an agenda of economic integration through plans to form enterprises with countries possessing similar entrepreneurial interests, thereby expanding and deepening regional cooperation. This way, Russia would get to maintain its most powerful ally as well as be able to find a union of solidarity to help overcome western sanctions. In addition, Russia must develop joint risk management approaches with whichever player it wishes to trade with in the future to circumvent secondary sanctions. However, if an alternate currency is adopted in order to trade, such as the Rouble or the Yuan, would it lead to the weakening of the dollar and raise the value of the ethnic medium. To materialize this, Russia can start by participating and holding stakes in multilateral structures, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, APEC, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and attending the East Asia Summit (Chufrin, Hong & Beng, 2006).

## Conclusion

The Asian economic security model differs from the pragmatic European and American ones and requires Moscow to re-evaluate its core ideals, modify its foreign policy perspectives and ponder how to execute them by devising a comprehensive strategy (Amirov, 1999). The Asia Pacific countries, being quite conservative, might also expect a long-term engagement with Russia as opposed to being a geopolitical option during the interim until estranged relations with the West reset back to normalcy. Therefore, Russia must measure the extent of its involvement and invest moderately in the Asia Pacific, for Moscow cannot forego its formidable economic, military and cultural might in Europe indefinitely (Ghoshal, 2013).

Hence, the Kremlin would be most successful if it did not go too far into the deep end of commitment and try to compensate for the losses suffered due to the West by creating dependency on the East. Thus, the most reliable and sustainable strategy would entail playing second fiddle to China in the region and being instrumental towards preserving the Chinese stronghold in the region whilst continuing to supply its commodities and services to players in cordial terms with China until tensions in the West subside, thereby allowing Russia to reclaim its political clout.

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## About the Author

Humsika Srikanth is a Research Affiliate at Christ University who specialises in the security dimensions of world politics, with her microscope presently focusing on East Asia. She has a penchant for all things foreign, whether it be cinema, clothing, cuisine, literature, architecture, spirituality or any other cultural representation from lands afar. She intends to further research on esoteric topics of International Relations and bring unique perspectives to the table.

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