The recent publication by Stephen F. Cohen of a critique of US policy towards Russia over the last two decades\(^1\) is a welcome reminder of the need to question some of the basic tenets of Washington's recent approach to Moscow, going beyond a bi-partisan consensus which does not always seem to have emerged out of a strong and open debate on the different alternatives at hand. However, the focus of the article is clearly centred on the Atlantic, and therefore does not take into account the changing geopolitical and geo-economic landscape following the end of the Cold War. Russia borders the Pacific and it is doubtful that she may achieve the status she craves for unless this geographical fact is translated into a first class role in the region, a development which may help Moscow and Washington find the accommodation that Cohen is hoping for. As recognized by Russian leaders themselves, the country's Far East remains in dire need of development, and although this is rarely stated openly, the resulting void is a clear invitation to China to seek control of the region. At the same time, Russian protestations against every step toward missile defence in Europe stand in contrast with the deafening silence with which Japanese progress in this field is met, forgetting the fact that should Tokyo succeed in developing a workable shield the repercussions would be felt beyond the Pacific and they would include a downgrading of Russia's strategic nuclear forces. In spite of the territorial dispute between the two countries, Japan's need for a new energy policy may pave the way for an agreement with Russia, which may take place in the context of an understanding with Washington concerning Korea and China. Unless this wider geographical scope of Russo-American relations is taken into account, it is doubtful that practical proposals may emerge out of Cohen's criticism of current US policy, no matter how well founded some of its aspects may be.

INTRODUCTION: COHEN'S VIEW OF US-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

As should be clear from the title, the present paper is not a direct refutation of Cohen's thesis, but rather an attempt to include the missing Asia-Pacific dimension in his analysis. This is the result of, on the one hand, the recognition that one of Russia's pending goals is a stronger presence in the region, and on the other, the view that only by devoting more attention to that ocean can Moscow and Washington finally reach an acceptable modus vivendi, which would feature other regional powers such as Japan.

In contrast with this, Cohen's paper seems to suffer from an obsessive focus on the Atlantic, which was already out of step with realities in the latter part of the Cold War, and which is nowadays even less adequate to examine relations between Moscow and

Washington. The 20 years following the fall of the Soviet Union have been witness not only to extraordinary economic growth in countries such as China, but also to a gradual but relentless shift in military power towards the Pacific and Indian Oceans, at the hands both of regional powers and also, more recently, as a result of the US decision to re-orient her military potential in that direction. Any analysis of US-Russian relations which overlooks these facts is bound to be not only incomplete, but unable to offer realistic policy options to overcome the current tensions between the two powers.

The following is an examination of the "five major points" in Cohen's paper, accompanied by comments on a number of these missing dimensions, together with, in some cases, the resulting policy proposals.

**FIRST POINT: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE US-RUSSIA BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP**

Cohen provides a number of reasons why "America's national security runs through Moscow" and "No other U.S. bilateral relationship is more vital". He begins referring to "Russia's enormous stockpiles of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction", which mean that she is "the only country capable of destroying the United States". Although this is a fact, at the same time it hints at two of the reasons why Russia is often not taken as seriously as she would like to. The first one is that this military potential is not balanced by a similar degree of economic power, and although security is important, countries also pay a lot of attention to their partner's trade and investment potential. This is not to say that Russia has none of them, but the country's leaders are the first to recognize that "modernization" is a challenge. The second one is that Russia's nuclear (or, more generally, non-conventional) capabilities are not balanced by an equally impressive set of conventional capabilities, in special of the kind necessary to deploy and sustain mobile forces far away from their home bases. Of course, Moscow has launched an ambitious program of military reforms with such gap in mind, and we must recognize not just the achievements to date but also the fact that it was initiated following a victory, something that countries find difficult to achieve, since it is often the defeated, not the victors, who learn the most from a military conflict. Russia on the other hand was quick to analyze some of the lessons learned from the brief 2008 summer war with Georgia, and together with her ongoing concern at Chinese rearmament the result was the current reforms. However, not until they have proceeded much further, will Russia's need for a massive stockpile of tactical nuclear weapons diminish. Furthermore, the resulting capabilities will also allow Moscow to play a stronger diplomatic hand in many situations where an agile expeditionary capability is necessary, even if just as a deterrent.

Cohen also refers to Russia's "disproportionate share of the world's essential resources" but this is not followed by an examination of their significance in the Asia-Pacific context. First of all, many are located in the country's Far East, a vast region suffering from depopulation and poor infrastructures, and discreetly coveted by the Chinese. Russian leaders and commentators have repeatedly referred to the need to develop it, turning it into a regional logistics and trading hub, but this would require the participation of a number of countries, including the US and some of her allies such as Japan, in order to prevent China from monopolizing the resulting transformations. It is here that Moscow has done little more than half-hearted attempts, since, for example, in
spite of a significant short-term energy assistance to Japan, in the shape of increased natural gas exports, following the Fukushima crisis, the two countries are still very far from concluding a peace treaty and more widely from entering a true partnership, in spite of clear overlapping interests in areas such as the Korean Peninsula, where both stand to lose if the North finally becomes a Chinese province de facto. While Moscow does not want Beijing to monopolize the purchase of her energy and resources in the Far East, Tokyo has, for different reasons, the same exact goal.

This section concludes with a reminder of Russia's size, "talented and nationalistic people", and her government's "traditions in international affairs", all of which together mean "that Russia will play a major role in the world". While none of this can seriously be questioned, the big question mark is to what extent it applies to the Pacific, since the old Atlantic-centred Cold War setting is dead. Furthermore, it has been dead for a long time, at the hands of Nixon's trip to China, Beijing's decision to open up, and longer-term geoeconomic trends slowly moving the world's centre of gravity towards the Pacific.

There is no reason why Russia should suffer from these changes, since she is indeed, by reasons both of geography and history, a Pacific power, but in order to fully benefit from them Moscow needs to launch a renewed drive to the Pacific, different in nature from the one that brought her to the Ocean's shores from her mediaeval birthplace, but not less determining for her future.

Unfortunately, this is not covered in Cohen's paper, which seems to be centred almost exclusively on the Atlantic. Although he is writing on US-Russian relations, this is no excuse, since both countries are connected by the two oceans, or, to be more precise, by three, the third one being the Arctic Ocean. Therefore, discussing only one while making only passing references to the other two not only means failing to provide a full analysis of bilateral relations and the prospects for their improvement, but even take us back to one of the reasons why Russia has not received much attention from America on recent years, namely the gap between a globally active US and a Western-oriented Russia which has failed to make her mark in the Pacific.

Can Moscow be taken seriously by Washington when she is persistently failing to play a first-rate role in the region, and while her own Far East remains underdeveloped? There are reasons to doubt it.

Cohen says that Russia "is an American national security imperative", perhaps this would be more accurate if she were at the forefront of developments in Asia-Pacific. One cannot aspire to be treated as an equal by a global power without being a global power oneself.

SECOND POINT: LACK OF A REAL AMERICAN-RUSSIAN PARTNERSHIP TODAY.

It is difficult to contest such assertion, which clearly fits the facts. As explained, however, a major factor in this lack of a true partnership is the absence of overlapping interests in Asia, or rather Russia's weakness in areas where such common interests clearly exist. A case in point would be the Korean peninsula, where it surely is neither
in America's nor in Russia's interest to see the North remain a Chinese protectorate. The example of Burma (Myanmar), where a turn towards pragmatism by Washington, New Delhi, and Tokyo, is gradually taking the country away from China's oppressive embrace and simultaneously favouring slow political change, may show the way ahead. The Korean Peninsula may well turn out to be an area where Russian-American cooperation could emerge, but that would demand significant changes on both sides, and a major expenditure of political capital by leaders in both countries. The US would have to abandon the misguided view that China is somehow part of the "solution" to problems in the Peninsula, when it is actually Beijing which saved the communists from an impending catastrophe following General MacArthur's master stroke at Inchon and which later provided the necessary technical assistance for the regime to develop its own nuclear weapons. In view of this, there is no reason to insist on holding talks in Beijing for example. Russia should pay more attention to her Eastern flank, often forgotten to the detriment of her Western regions, where most of the population lives.

The speed with which communist Vietnam has left behind her Chinese sponsors and turned into a natural ally of Japan and the US, while continuing to rely on purchases of Russian weapons (note for example the recent agreement to jointly develop drones), could be seen as an example. Of course every case is different, but there is no reason why Koreans, of any political persuasion, should welcome their subjugation to China, unless essential to remain in power. If we take into account that fact that Russia is interested in blocking the way to open waters by China (the country shares a border with North Korea), selling energy to both South Korea and Japan, and having both countries participate in their modernization efforts and, more specifically, in her struggle to develop her Far East, and we add to that Pyongyang's quest for a security guarantee and diversification of her foreign political and economic relations, plus Washington's and Tokyo's interest in removing a major military threat, the prospects for Russian-American cooperation seem much brighter.

It would be simplistic to view cooperation in Asia as an automatic, almost magical, solution to the problems besetting US-Russia bilateral relations, but to some extent their common interests there may compensate for some inevitable friction in Europe, the Caucasus, and Black Sea regions. Georgia, for example, has broken away from her Russian and Soviet past. By that we are not referring to any government policy or figure, but rather to a cultural change whereby the population is looking elsewhere in terms of historical and economic referents. That is not going to change, although Tbilisi may be well advised to reflect on the reasons why Abkhazia and South Ossetia were quick to seize the chance to break away, and embark on a much more pragmatic course of action designed to gradually improve the nowadays very slight chances of rapprochement. At the same time, the region remains vital to Russian national security, and this, combined with the domestic political impossibility of having the US completely abandon Georgia, is sure to keep provoking a fair amount of tension. If Washington and Moscow do not cooperate in Asia, that is bound to affect the overall health of the relationship, whereas if the contrary is the case it may help compensate for the differences in the European theatre.

The quest for a real partnership between Washington and Moscow cannot be based on nostalgia for the old Euro-Atlantic order, but rather on the entry by the front door of Russia into the concert of Asia-Pacific powers.
THIRD POINT: BLAME FOR THE FAILURE TO ESTABLISH A PARTNERSHIP

In this section, Cohen blames Washington for the failure to set up a true partnership between the US and Russia. Again, the lack of attention to the Asia-Pacific theatre means the analysis of some of the major points may be seen as incomplete. We will concentrate on missile defence, both because of the great importance that Moscow attaches to it and due to the fact that the Asian is clearly changing the rules of the game in this area.

Cohen criticizes the US for "withdrawing from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which Moscow regarded as the linchpin of its nuclear security", in a comment which blatantly disregards developments in Asia. Is it true that Russia is interested in the nuclear status quo, that is the MAD (mutual assured destruction) guaranteed by her vast strategic missile arsenal? Yes, of course it is. Is it true that American actions, not just withdrawing from the ABM treaty, are therefore perceived as aggressive by Russia? Again, of course it is. It is at this point, however, that we must be careful, and avoid simplistic analysis or longings for a bygone Atlantic-centred era which is not coming back. Let us imagine for a second that Washington agreed to return to the ABM Treaty and stop all work on missile defences. Although on the surface, and at least in the short run, this may be welcomed by Moscow, the truth is that countries like Japan would keep working in these technologies, for the simple reason that North Korea (and ultimately China, although this may not be always stated plainly in polite circles) constitutes a direct threat to their national security. Now, once the Japanese achieved that capability, the resulting devaluation of the Russian nuclear arsenal would be exactly the same as if this technological breakthrough were achieved in the European theatre, it would make no difference. Furthermore, the recent relaxation of Tokyo's ban on sales of weapons abroad makes it even likelier that any such technology would soon find its way to the Atlantic.

A clear reminder of the Pacific dimension of missile defence came in March this year, when Japanese Defence Minister Naoki Tanaka warned that his country may shoot down a North Korean satellite planned to be launched in contravention of UNSC resolutions. Unfortunately this is not present in Cohen's analysis, although he refers to "missile defense" as one of "Russia's top priorities". If that is the case, and there is little doubt that there is, the time is ripe to push forward with negotiations with Japan. After all, if Moscow is already cooperating with the French and German defence industries, there is no reason why it should be unthinkable that she may do so with Japan's.

Therefore, we may beg to differ from the assertion that "every opportunity for a U.S.-Russian partnership during the past twenty years was lost, or is being lost, in Washington, not in Moscow". If no agreement is reached between Japan and Russia, can we say that it is the fault of the US?

FOURTH POINT: LACK OF AMERICAN CONCESSIONS

Comments to this section will be brief, since it does not directly address the issue at hand and some of the things which could be added have already been noted down. It may be necessary to reflect, however, on the extent to which it has only been Moscow
which has made, or expected to make, concessions. NATO may have expanded eastwards, as explained by Cohen, but may the Atlantic Alliance have lost some cohesion in the process? We have already indicated how the French and the Germans are selling advanced weapons to Russia, barely a sign of encirclement. Surely the Poles and other Eastern Europeans may differ from his assessment, if they were asked. In the field of energy we can also see some major concessions by the West, with, among others, Germany's refusal to let the EU directly fund Nabucco, choosing instead to import Russian gas straight through Nord Stream.

The contrast with the Asia Pacific is, once again, stark. Why has Moscow not followed the same strategy and built a natural gas pipeline to South Korea, bypassing China? Is that also the fault of the US?

FIFTH POINT: BIPARTISAN NATURE OF US POLICIES

There is little we can add here, since Cohen's observations are accurate and up to the point. Washington's policies have clearly been bipartisan, and, furthermore, the American media have not made an effort to provide an independent and balanced analysis.

We may perhaps add that, again, both with regard to successive administrations and different media outlets, part of the problem lies in the absence of any meaningful discussion of Moscow's Pacific dimension, surely not helped by the Russian leadership's inability to devote the necessary efforts to that theatre, but which nevertheless is no excuse for America's scant attention to the possibilities which may be opened by such a move.

CONCLUSIONS: TOWARDS A NEW AMERICAN (AND RUSSIAN) POLICY

As stated at the beginning, this is not meant to be criticism or rebuttal of Cohen's thesis, but rather an "Asia-Pacific Addendum" to it. It should be clear that the state of US-Russia relations is not what it should be, and that this is in neither power's interest. However, an analysis of the causes of the present state of affairs, and even more, meaningful proposals for its improvements, cannot forget Russia's Asia-Pacific dimension and Washington's global interests and position in that region. Only by cooperating in areas where Moscow's and Washington's interest overlap can the bilateral relationship improve, and these areas are by no means limited to the Atlantic.

Furthermore, some of the key issues at stake between the US and Russia, such as missile defence, are no longer in the hands of these two countries. Unless Moscow reaches some sort of deal with Tokyo, any concessions by Washington in this area may be meaningless.

A true "reset" can only take place in the context of a Russian "Pacific Century".

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