



Chapter 7

Russia and Northeast Asia: Unrealized Potential

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Introduction

Russia's global interests include sustaining the current regime, developing its economy, and resisting and reforming the U.S.-led international system to establish Russia as one of several global powers. Russia's objectives in Northeast Asia that nest within its global ambitions primarily include expansion of economic relationships as part of its "Turn to the East" policy. Russia's economic relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC) currently dwarfs those with the rest of Northeast Asia, and the "Turn to the East" policy would optimally enhance these relationships in an effort to meaningfully diversify its economic ties. Russia's strategy in Northeast Asia is therefore coherent with its international goals, but more nuanced because of Russia's strategic partnership with the PRC, and because of the unique economic potential of the region. This chapter will address Russia's interactions with the Republic of Korea (Korea), Taiwan, Mongolia, and Japan. It will also complement the Russia-PRC chapter in this book by showing how the Russia-PRC relationship enables and constrains Russia's role in Northeast Asia.

The impetus for Russia's "Turn to the East" policy was to seek new markets before, and especially after, economic sanctions resulting from its unlawful annexation of Crimea reduced the viability of Western economic relationships. Russia also seeks to develop the Russia Far East (RFE) region, which is proximate to many of the larger Asian economies including the PRC, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. Russia hopes that increased economic activity will result in more foreign direct investment, increased trade volume, and a generally better standard of living for its citizens in the region. Russia's strategic approach to Korea includes the possibility that better economic relations with Korea could also include the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), which would ideally lead to a more stable and peaceful Eastern border. Similarly, potential Russian engagement with Taiwan would not be straightforward, and would be influenced by Russia's relationship with the PRC and its "One China" Principle.

Russia's relationship with Mongolia follows a slightly different pattern than its engagement with the rest of Northeast Asia, and encompasses more than economic ties. An early ally of the Soviet Union with cultural and geographic links to the Asian heartland, Mongolia in many ways has closer resemblance to the former Soviet Central Asia republics than to other Northeast Asian states. Mongolia's relationship with Russia today reflects these historical and cultural ties. Despite Mongolia's standing as a vibrant and free democracy, its challenging geography limits its strategic options. Completely surrounded by Russia and the PRC with no land bridge or ports to guarantee third country border or market access, Mongolia has an incentive to maintain good relations with both big neighbors, which remains the principle pillar

of Mongolian foreign policy. Russia's interest in Mongolia is therefore primarily one of preserving influence in Russia's near abroad and maintaining Great Power status in the face of expanding Chinese economic and political influence.

Russia pursues economic ties with Japan, but its relationship is also tinged with historical underpinnings. Russia's experience with Japan dates back to encounters during Russian expansion into East Asia in the mid-19th Century, ultimately clashing in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05. Japan's convincing defeat of Russia in that war shocked most of the world and announced Japan's coming of age as a modern Great Power. Following World War II, however, the tables were turned. The Soviet Union, then part of the Allied powers, declared war on Japan in August 1945, and upon conclusion of the war annexed the Southern Kuril Islands. Japan considers the southern four islands of the chain as its own Northern Territories. Multiple Japanese attempts to recover these islands since then have been unsuccessful. Current efforts by Japan to negotiate a settlement in this dispute will not succeed because Japan and Russia currently have divergent core interests. Japan wants to settle its lingering World War II era conflicts and so settle the dispute, and Russia wants to sustain legitimacy as a Great Power which makes it reluctant to cede any territory under its control.

Russian Ways and Means

Russia pursues its objectives in this region primarily through economic means, though also in limited ways through governance and providing security. Mongolia, is, in fact, the only nation in Northeast Asia where Russia provides security as a means of influence. However, while Russia has historically been Mongolia's security guarantor, Mongolia carefully maintains an independent foreign policy through a "Third Neighbor Policy" that emphasizes cooperation with international democratic partners in addition to its two large neighbors.¹ Manifested through robust security contributions to UN Peacekeeping and to coalition operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, Mongolia establishes diplomatic flexibility through international relations. Those troop contributions to Iraq and Afghanistan as a NATO partner have generated occasional Russian concern as they threaten Russia's traditional security role with Mongolia. Russia seeks to protect this role using myriad other security cooperation means. For instance, Russia hosts an annual bilateral military exercise with Mongolia and requested Mongolian participation with the PRC in the massive *Vostok* war games in 2018, adding international legitimacy to Russia's security arrangements in the Far East. Russia has also encouraged Mongolia to upgrade from observer status to full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and remains the principle supplier of military equipment to the Mongolian military, maintaining de facto veto power over Mongolian defense acquisitions, guaranteeing continued economic advantage and security influence.

Russia's role as security guarantor notwithstanding, its strongest influence in Mongolia is actually best exercised through lingering cultural soft power. Fiercely proud and independent, Mongolians credit the Soviet Union with protecting their independent state from the PRC in the early 20th century and owe much of the major infrastructure to Soviet investments. Russia enjoys goodwill from the Mongolian people, and public opinion overwhelmingly ranks Russia as its most popular partner.² Russia maintains a massive embassy in Ulaanbaatar, supports study and cultural programs, and enjoys support from the older generations that ubiquitously speak

¹ Mongolia National Security Council, "National Security Concept of Mongolia," <https://nsc.gov.mn/mn>.

² International Republican Institute Center for Insights in Survey Research with Government of Canada, National Survey of Mongolian Public Opinion, March 2016, 53.

Russian as a second language. Russian goodwill is of course only half the story; with two neighbors, each has an impact. Historically, China has always been Mongolia's primary security threat, and though economic ties have dramatically increased, resulting in an overwhelming economic dependency, Mongolian leaders quietly question Chinese intentions, reinforcing the need for strong security relations with Russia.

Russia's potential relationship with Japan is limited by the Kuril Islands dispute, where it administers and exercises sovereignty over islands Japan refers to as the Northern Territories. Japan and the Soviet Union first addressed this disagreement together in 1956, when the Soviet Union offered to return control of the southernmost two islands to Japan in exchange for it renouncing its claim to the northernmost two islands as part of a peace treaty ending World War II. Japan refused the offer, and the dispute over the islands remains, despite numerous failed attempts to rectify the situation. An attendant consequence of this impasse is that World War II remains officially unresolved between Japan and Russia. The world situation has also changed dramatically in the intervening years, and currently Russia is becoming more closely aligned with the PRC, as noted in another chapter of this book. Settling this dispute is important for Japan on many levels, including finally concluding World War II, the historical memory of which still generates much regional animosity toward Japan.

Aside from the obvious fact that Russia has the dominant position in this dispute because it currently administers the islands, Russia's interests are best served by retaining control of its possessions. The islands' Exclusive Economic Zone provides Russia access to rich fisheries, as well as possible oil and gas deposits.³ Russian military bases on the islands enable it to project power into the North Pacific Ocean. The islands enclose the Sea of Okhotsk, a bastion for Russia's Pacific Fleet ballistic missile submarines, and give Russian vessels unimpeded access to the Pacific Ocean.⁴ Russia's sovereignty and security are therefore enhanced by refusing to negotiate these territories away.

Russia retains influence in the SCO, which really only affects Mongolia in Northeast Asia, and in recent years both Russia and the PRC have exerted considerable pressure on Mongolia to upgrade its membership, suggesting that future One Belt One Road and Eurasian Economic Union development projects could be prioritized to SCO full members. While Mongolia has been a SCO observer since 2005, it has consistently resisted invitations to join as a full member in line with its preference for non-alignment. While it may not be in the interest of other Northeast Asia nations to join the SCO, Russia would like to see its former client states join the framework to strengthen SCO legitimacy through broadened international membership.⁵

Though Russia seeks to build influence in the region through aforementioned security relationships, sovereignty, and governance through the SCO, Russian ways and means to achieve its goals in Northeast Asia are primarily through the use of economic tools. Though there are Great Power aspects to its actions, Russia generally behaves well in Northeast Asia in contrast to its misconduct in Europe. In short, Russia is remarkably unremarkable in its approach to achieving its ends in Northeast Asia. There are challenges, however, to Russia's efforts in region.

³ "Japan Objects to Russian Geological Survey Near Disputed Isles," *Intellasia.net*, June 27, 2020, <https://www.intellasia.net/japan-objects-to-russian-geological-survey-near-disputed-isles-790062>.

⁴ Tetsuo Kotani, "China and Russia in the Western Pacific: Implications for Japan and the United States," *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, April 18, 2019, <https://www.nbr.org/publication/china-and-russia-in-the-western-pacific-implications-for-japan-and-the-united-states/>.

⁵ Sergey Radchenko, "As China and Russia Draw Closer, Mongolia Feels the Squeeze," *The ASAN Forum*, October 2018.

If Russia wants to take advantage of economic opportunities in Northeast Asia more broadly, its main challenge will be balancing its economic priorities with geopolitical considerations of its primary partner in the region, the PRC. The PRC levied informal economic sanctions on Korea over the emplacement of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system in 2017, and has taken many actions against Taiwan to show its displeasure since Tsai Ing-Wen became President in 2016.⁶ Disagreement between the PRC and these entities could adversely affect Russian economic interests in region. Russia is also at risk of being brought into some undesirable situation, or that Russia would be judged complicit regardless.

Similar to its relationship with the PRC, Russia's economy is mostly complementary to that of both Korea and Taiwan. Russia has found markets for its natural resources, and sees both states as sources of finished goods and higher technology products. Particular to Korea, Russia offers potential transit routes to more distant markets through either its Trans-Siberian Railway, or the nascent Northern Sea Route, both of which are proximate to Korea and could be beneficial to it. However, these potential transit routes are also a limitation, and exemplify a larger issue in the RFE: without significant investment in port, rail, and other infrastructure, these transit routes will remain potential unrealized.⁷

Russian and Korean approaches to trade and investment relations can best be described as making big plans but implementing them slowly. For example, as early as 2008 both sides declared their intention to form a strategic partnership, but concrete action has failed to materialize. Korea has proposed several initiatives to increase the scope and depth of the economic relationship, but these initiatives have been slow to implement. In 2017, President Moon Jae-in proposed his "9-Bridge Strategy" that would focus Russian and Korean trade and investment efforts in nine broad categories including infrastructure, agriculture, and fisheries.⁸ While still in the early stages of implementation, there are concerns that only a few of the focus areas are viable in the short term.⁹ Additionally, efforts to create a free trade agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union and Korea have stalled because Russia is worried about advantaging Korea, and while Korea would prefer investment protections in place before investing, Russia is hungry to see evidence of investments first.¹⁰

Russia's desire to increase economic activity with Korea are also hampered by geopolitical hurdles. For instance, Russia aspires to include the DPRK in this economic activity in an effort to stabilize the Korean Peninsula, and this end state is broadly in sync with that of the Moon Jae-in administration, though various trade and investment agreements have been negated by sanctions against the DPRK or undercut by Pyongyang's saber-rattling.¹¹ Additionally, Russia's efforts to engage Korea must acknowledge the reality that Korea is a treaty ally of the

⁶ Chun Han Wong, "Taiwan's President Renews Call to Hold Firm Against Chinese Pressure," *Wall Street Journal*, May 20, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/taiwans-president-renews-call-to-hold-firm-against-chinese-pressure-11589977931>.

⁷ Anthony V. Rinna, "Moscow's 'Turn to the East' and Challenges to Russia-South Korea Economic Collaboration Under the New Northern Policy," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 10, no. 2 (2019): 165.

⁸ Liudmila Zakharova, "Economic Relations Between Russia and South Korea in the New Northern Policy," *Korea Economic Institute of America Academic Paper Series*, December 10, 2019, 2.

⁹ Zakharova, "Economic Relations between Russia and South Korea," 6-7.

¹⁰ Zakharova, "Economic Relations between Russia and South Korea," 3-4.

¹¹ Zakharova, "Economic Relations between Russia and South Korea," 5-6.

United States and thus is more likely to adhere to sanctions regimes and to cooperate with the United States on issues that may be contrary to Russian interests in the region. This dynamic is already at play, and has probably negatively impacted Russian efforts to establish trilateral trade and infrastructure with Korea and the DPRK.

Trade between Russia and Taiwan is surprisingly robust, considering the influence of the PRC on both parties. It is dominated by Russian export of natural resources, including coal, oil, and iron, and import of finished goods such as computers and auto parts. Overall trade has grown over the past decade, with Russia holding a significant trade surplus in the relationship.¹² Notably, Russia and Taiwan have a visa waiver program, with Russian citizens eligible for a stay up to twenty-one days in Taiwan without a visa. This program supplements Taiwan's push for more tourism to make up for decline in tour group numbers from the PRC since 2016. Two-way tourism between Russia and Taiwan has increased, with a seventy percent rise of Russian visits to Taiwan from 2018 to 2019.¹³

While Russia has ceded most economic influence in Mongolia to the PRC, Russia still maintains dominance in key electricity and fuel markets. Mongolia's energy grid maintains necessary connections with Russia to help meet demand, importing power with unfavorable pricing during periods of peak use, which gives Russia economic and political leverage.¹⁴ Russia blocked a 2016 Mongolian government plan to build a hydropower plant along Mongolia's northern Eg River to shore up domestic power production. Funded by a US\$1 billion Chinese development loan, Russia raised concerns over potential environmental impacts on Lake Baikal, causing the PRC to suspend the project despite Mongolian support. Russia in turn offered to export additional electricity to meet Mongolian demand, increasing Mongolian reliance on Russian energy, and resulting in Mongolian politicians railing against unfair dependency conditions.¹⁵

Russia's proximity to Japan could facilitate economic opportunity across a range of sectors. For instance, Japan currently imports most of its energy through the Strait of Malacca, while its Russian neighbor is rich in hydrocarbon deposits and could potentially mitigate this strategic vulnerability for Japan. Overall, Japan is the world's third largest economy and a source of technology that Russia could use if it were to diversify its economy, as well as a source of high quality manufactured goods for the Russian market. In an attempt to develop a stronger economic relationship, Japan has pressured its corporations to invest in the Russian economy despite Japanese sanctions on Russia following the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea. Japan would benefit economically from closer association with Russia, and these closer ties could also eventually lead to resolution of the Kuril Islands dispute.¹⁶ Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party attempted to woo Russia into resolution of the dispute by offering business deals as late as

¹² Ministry of Economic Affairs, Bureau of Foreign Trade, "Taiwan-Russia Economic Relations," December 5, 2018, https://www.trade.gov.tw/english/Pages/Detail.aspx?nodeID=2912&pid=655091&dl_DateRange=all&txt_SD=&txt_ED=&txt_Keyword=&Pageid=0.

¹³ Chris Chang, "Rep. Office of the MTC Optimistic About Taiwan-Russia Ties," *Taiwan News*, May 14, 2020, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3933978>.

¹⁴ Energy Charter Secretariat, "In-depth Review of the Investment Climate and Market Structure in the Energy Sector of Mongolia," Brussels (2013): 55-66.

¹⁵ "Russia Stalls China's \$1 Billion Hydropower Loan for Mongolia," *Bloomberg*, July 11, 2016.

¹⁶ Linda Sieg and Takashi Umekawa, "Government Lobbies Wary Firms to Invest in Russia in Bid to Resolve Territorial Dispute," *The Japan Times*, November 2, 2016, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/02/national/politics-diplomacy/government-lobbies-wary-firms-invest-russia-bid-resolve-territorial-dispute/>.

September 2019, though this is only the latest of numerous attempts by Japan's ruling party to finally resolve the dispute.¹⁷ This is no longer a realistic proposal, though, because the PRC has become Russia's East Asia partner of choice, and because Russia is wary of how United States' influence on its alliance partner could affect Japan's decision-making regarding Russia.¹⁸

Opportunities, Limits, and, Challenges

Russia's relationships in Northeast Asia support its strategic goals of developing its economy to sustain the power of the current autocratic regime. Russia's relative lack of bad behavior in the region, as compared to Europe, and Russia's desire to develop the RFE present it opportunities. However, the difficult history and existing relationships within the region, along with Russia's own inability to diversify its economy beyond hydrocarbon sales, is limiting Russia's progress. Additionally, Russia's growing partnership with the PRC will present both challenges and opportunities to Russia and the other stakeholders within the region.

Russia has shown that it pursues a foreign policy sometimes at odds with that of the PRC. If Russia continues to strengthen economic relationships with both Korea and Taiwan, it presumably would be less likely to jeopardize these relationships if it was deriving significant trade and investment benefits from them. An exception would be if the cross-Strait situation worsens significantly, and the PRC applies substantial pressure on Russia to take some sort of action due to Taiwan's status as one of the PRC's core interests. Regarding Taiwan, Russia acts similarly to most countries in its management of relations. Moscow maintains unofficial relations with Taipei, with both capitals hosting unofficial organizations performing traditional embassy functions, though, again, this is contrary to PRC preferences.

Minus the complications a cross-Strait conflict would entail, Russia could integrate well into the Northeast Asia market economy where sometimes the only connection bringing countries together is tightly joined trade and investment relationships. And while these close economic relationships can enable countries to use them coercively, such as the PRC did to express its displeasure with THAAD in Korea, Russia would be less likely to use coercive economic tools in its Far East region because this region is already among Russia's poorest, and thus less resilient to economic shocks. However, this could change if the RFE gained significant leverage by becoming the region's primary oil supplier. In the long term, stronger economic relations between Russia and other countries in Northeast Asia could provide some level of diversification Russia needs, and have a moderating effect on Russian behavior regarding the need to support the PRC.

While the PRC's rising economic clout has displaced Russia as the dominant market for Mongolian goods and services, accounting now for nearly ninety percent of Mongolian exports, Russia still maintains some of its traditional political and security sphere of influence in Mongolia.¹⁹ Despite laudable efforts to generate strategic options through its Third Neighbor Policy, Mongolia remains physically isolated between Russia and the PRC, and this curse of geography impacts all decisions and limits Mongolia's options. When Mongolians are asked who

¹⁷ "Putin Rebuffs Call by Japan's Abe to Sign WWII Peace Treaty," *The Moscow Times*, September 5, 2019, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/09/05/putin-rebuffs-call-by-japans-abe-to-sign-world-war-two-peace-treaty-a67162>.

¹⁸ James D.J. Brown, "Time for Japan to Reassess its Russia Policy," *The Japan Times*, July 27, 2019, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2019/07/26/commentary/japan-commentary/time-japan-reassess-russia-policy/>.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of Commerce, "Mongolia—Market Overview," *Export.gov*, August 8, 2017, <https://www.export.gov/apex/article2?id=Mongolia-Market-Overview>.

they trust more between neighbors, historical precedent always weighs in Russia's favor. Despite this advantage, Mongolian independence and its vibrant democracy present challenges to Russia's efforts to maintain strong influence in its near-abroad. While Russian media permeates the Mongolian market, younger generations of Mongolians increasingly choose English as a second language, opting to engage with the West.²⁰ Russian economic weakness and global overreach also leave little remaining capital for economic or security investments in Mongolia. Mongolia's development needs are vast, and tangible improvements are national priorities, so while Mongolia welcomes offers from both neighbors' Eurasian Economic Union and One Belt One Road initiatives, follow-through and groundbreaking takes priority over empty promises.

Partnership with Japan would undoubtedly multiply Russia's economic potential, but Russia sees the PRC as increasingly able to fulfill that role as the two co-develop their technology sectors. President Putin can also use the Kuril Islands dispute to demonstrate authority to his domestic audience and play to his populist base, enhancing his ability to maintain, and to extend, his grip on governance. Russia sees itself as a global Great Power, including and increasingly in the Indo-Pacific region, and Great Powers do not cede territory to partners of a strategic competitor. Russia therefore maintains its legitimacy by refusing to seriously negotiate the Kuril Islands dispute with Japan.²¹

COVID-19 has perhaps accentuated the core dynamic of the Russia-PRC relationship and at the same time limited the opportunity for the states of Northeast Asia to respond. The PRC has become very aggressive in its geopolitical dealing and simultaneously very heavy handed in domestic policy since the onset of the pandemic. The PRC's forceful actions in the South China Sea and on the Himalayan border with India, as well as its suppression of Hong Kong and mistreatment of its Uighur population provide an incentive for Northeast Asia to balance against it. Cooperating with Russia would be one way to do so, but Russia's weaker position as a result of COVID-19, its desire to maintain Great Power status, and its growing dependence on the PRC, will all conspire to decrease what is possible for Northeast Asian states to accomplish with Russia.

Implications for United States, Friends, and Allies

The implications of Russia's involvement with Northeast Asia cannot be evaluated by simply considering Russia and the region. In many cases, one must include Russia's relationship with the PRC to obtain a more complete understanding of the regional dynamics, similar to how U.S. relationships with each country factor into how they interact with Russia. Considering how Japan and the Republic of Korea are treaty allies of the United States, and how the Biden administration has prioritized rebuilding bilateral relations with both of them, this perspective is particularly relevant. The growing Russia-PRC partnership also complicates U.S. decision-making in this region, and impacts each of the countries in Northeast Asia as depicted in subsequent paragraphs.

Increased Russian economic interaction with Korea has the potential to make Korea's relationships in the region even more complex. Seoul already balances between its relationship

²⁰ Battulga Khaltmaagiin, Remarks at Youth for English Program, August 2019, <https://president.mn/en/2019/08/22/remarks-by-president-khaltmaagiin-battulga-at-the-closing-of-the-youth-for-english-program/>.

²¹ Dmitry Streltsov, "Why Russia and Japan Can't Solve the Kuril Islands Dispute," *The Moscow Times*, January 24, 2019, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/01/24/why-russia-and-japan-cant-solve-the-kuril-islands-dispute-op-ed-a64277>.

with the PRC, its alliance with the United States, and its position as a “spoke” relative to Japan instead of existing in a multilateral relationship with other U.S. allies. Considering these factors, Korea will pursue economic benefits with Russia if it is in its interest, but will continuously hedge and be more deliberate in its decision-making if that economic relationship has the potential to adversely impact other, more important relationships with the United States, the PRC, and Japan.

The U.S. has a strong unofficial relationship with Taiwan, and this relationship necessitates U.S. understanding of how enhanced ties between Taiwan and Russia, a strategic partner of the PRC, would affect cross-Strait dynamics if Russia played a larger role in Taiwan or in the region more broadly in peacetime. The U.S. would also need to consider and be prepared for potential Russian support in various forms if the PRC employed a more coercive approach toward Taiwan.

The current trend of growing cooperation between Russia and the PRC is challenging for Mongolia. Mongolia’s historical approach to international relations is through balancing its neighbors against each other, but increased Sino-Russian cooperation limits space for an independent Mongolian policy. That cooperation may yield benefits through regional investment and infrastructure projects, though, and Mongolia has been excited by the prospects of hosting future oil pipelines to the PRC and establishment of a greater North East Asia energy grid.²² From a political and security perspective however, that cooperation risks increased pressure on Mongolian liberal institutions and further isolation of the lone democracy in an authoritarian neighborhood. Increased pressure from a Russia-PRC united front could practically limit Mongolia’s freedom to support its preferred Western agenda.

In addition to its concern about Great Power status, Russia will not resolve the Kuril Islands dispute with Japan because doing so would decrease its national security. The unfortunate implication for Japan is that one of its significant territorial disputes, and the associated reminder of World War II, will linger. Because the Northern Territories are not and were not under Japanese administration at the time the treaty was ratified, the U.S. is not obligated under the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty to involve itself in this dispute. But while not engaged directly with this dispute, there are implications for United States. This unresolved issue between Japan and Russia complicates Japan’s political and military decision-making, and thus affects unity of effort with its treaty ally, the United States, as it pursues joint objectives in the region.

Recommendations

The Biden administration’s initial foreign policy leanings portend a significant focus on Northeast Asia. This focus centers on competing with the PRC and Russia, and reinvigorating relationships with treaty allies and regional partners. These recommendations are offered with this thinking in mind.

The U.S. should work to build stronger relationships between its allies with the goal of a true multiparty alliance structure. The U.S. should encourage allies Japan and Korea to explore additional multilateral defense arrangements such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. Diplomatically, the U.S. should reassure Japan and Korea that the alliances are more viable than ever to prevent them from seeking to hedge with other powers. Russia has already shown it is willing to test the strength of the hub and spokes system by challenging the airspace over

²² Bolor Lkhaajav, “Mongolia Securing an Energy Alliance with Russia and China,” *The Diplomat*, July 02, 2020.

Dokdo/Takeshima in a joint patrol with the PLA. Stronger relations between allies and partners will minimize Russian, and PRC, ability to sow dissension or pit one ally against another.

The U.S. should work across elements of national power to strengthen its relationship with Japan. Economically, the U.S. should re-enter the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, now retitled the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and led by Japan. Japan and the U.S. could also work together to diversify supply chains after the COVID-19 pandemic exposed uncomfortable reliance on the PRC. Militarily, the U.S. should quickly settle its debate with Japan over alliance funding and recognize the value Japan brings to the alliance by providing access and basing, and through its geography. The U.S. could also support Japan's efforts to expand military activities consistent with its Constitution, and to further explore collective defense arrangements. These efforts will enable Japan to better manage the growing threat of the Russia-PRC partnership.

The U.S. should encourage Japan to table its desire to settle the Kuril Islands dispute in the near-term. Russia will likely become increasingly frustrated with the PRC after its partnership enables the PRC to steal Russian technology, devour Russian resources, and dictate terms to Russia as the PRC has done in all of its relationships. This will take time, but Japan will eventually be in better position to negotiate with Russia by taking the extended view. In the interim, strengthening the Japan-U.S. alliance and exercising strategic patience will ultimately lead to the best outcome.

The U.S. should focus on two areas to help Mongolia maximize its status as a free and independent partner in Northeast Asia: support for the Third Neighbor Policy, and support for Mongolian democracy. The geographic factor is unavoidable, and significant Russian influence over this partner is an enduring fact. Trying to eliminate that influence would prove impossible, but support for Mongolian institutions and independent foreign policy can help moderate the worst impacts. The U.S. should continue to provide training and equipment for Mongolia's global peacekeepers and encourage Mongolia's free vote in all UN forums. Whether Mongolia eventually joins the Shanghai Cooperation Organization or not should be a Mongolian choice made on Mongolian terms. With Mongolia effectively a lone island of democracy surrounded by authoritarian states, the U.S. has every interest in supporting Mongolian democratic institutions and sustaining soft power engagement to insulate Mongolia's freedom of decision-making.

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