XVII. The Changing Face of the Russian Far East: Cooperation and Resource Competition Between Japan, Korea, and China in Northeast Asia

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Abstract

When significant changes take place in one part of the world, it is to be expected that effects will be felt elsewhere. Particularly in an era of increasing globalization, as regions and countries become inextricably linked to each other, what takes place in one region will be felt in another. This is clearly the case with the Greater Middle East (GME). As this region expands in scope and composition, those areas on the borders must deal with the consequences. For example, much attention is placed on European reactions to and relations with the GME. Whether it is in terms of energy transfers, European Union programs regarding a “dialogue with Islam,” or NATO’s “Mediterranean Dialogue,” there is a strong sense that Europeans must remain engaged with the region. However, can the same be said for states to the East, particularly in the Far East? Is there a connection, and if so, how does this region relate to the GME? In short, why should someone examining the intricacies of state and societal development in the GME care about what takes place in the Russian Far East? There are several reasons that will be assessed in this chapter. First, the uncertainty of resource management and exploitation in the GME does mean that states in the Far East need to evaluate their own resource capabilities and needs. Developments within the GME necessitate a more thorough evaluation of what exists in the Far East for the countries in the region. Second, this sense of resource needs is in contrast to a political reality in the region: the major states have their own national security concerns located in other areas, thus creating a political and security “void.” Russia, for example, gives higher
priority to the West (Europe) and the South (Middle East). China remains committed to security concerns to the Southeast (Taiwan) and increasingly to the West (Central Asia and South Asia). Are the states in question devoting enough attention to the area that intersects them all? Third, if the states in the region believe that regional cooperation is important to address the first part above, the realities of the second part will most likely dampen any chance at true cooperation and regional development. How to overcome these problems and prevent the region from becoming a true “void” is the challenge of the states in the Far East today and in the future. A proper analysis of these security issues requires that one examine the perceptions held within the region, the capabilities and limitations of the respective governments, and an understanding of how these geopolitical differences have played out in the past.

INTRODUCTION

When significant change takes place in one part of the world, it no longer should be surprising that effects will be felt elsewhere. Particularly in an era of increasing globalization, as regions and countries become inextricably linked with each other, these cause-and-effect relationships are only deepened. Over the past decade, this has been the case with the Greater Middle East (GME). As defined throughout the present volume, this geographical and cultural space is expanding in scope and composition. Those countries located along the borders must, as a result, deal with the consequences. For example, much attention is placed on developing “Good Neighborhood Policy,” or North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO’s) “Mediterranean Dialogue,” there is a strong sense that Europeans must remain engaged with the region. Can the same be said for states to the East, particularly in the Far East? Is there a connection? If so, how does this region relate to the GME? On the surface, there are trade ties and political relations that are important today. Does the expansion of the GME signal any negative changes for the Far East? One potential object of study is a subregion that itself was claimed to be an expanding region or a new frontier for many years: the Russian Far East (RFE). During the Soviet period, it was a region of economic exploration as well as a border zone between the major powers of the Cold War. The Soviet Union, China, and the United States (US). However, during the past decade, international attention has shifted to the GME, leaving the RFE outside of the spotlight. If this is so, one could ask the question: Why should someone examining the intricacies of state and societal development in the GME care about what takes place in the Far East, particularly the Russian Far East? There are several reasons that will be assessed in this chapter.