

Leontyeva Tamaza

Vladivostok State University of Economics Vladivostok

Russia and America: Time of Great Opportunity

A historical overview of contacts between Russia and the U. S. A. is suggestive of further nearing our two nations through the Pacific Rim relationship. The aim of this article is to study these opportunities along three basic lines: political, economic and cultural. To begin with let us make a short excursus into the history of the Pacific Rim community.

The Pacific Rim Forum was created in 1989 as a regional variant of answer to the challenges of globalization. Its aim was promoting cooperation between the countries-members located in this area through liberalization of investments and forming a long-term system of free and open trade. There are 21 Pacific Rim states within it which constitute 60% of the world GNP, 50% of world trade and 40% of population. The tasks vary: after the financial crisis of 1997 in Asia, for example, it was the task of restoring and maintaining economic growth of those countries by strengthening their financial stability [3; 11-17]. Russia regards its participation in it as a chance of gradual involvement into regional integration processes and as a «Euro-Asian» mission. For the U. S. A. it is another opportunity to perform its leading role in the world's economic, political and cultural development. In the light of this information it would be interesting to analyze Russian-American relations within the Pacific basin.

The latest years have witnessed growing presence of the U. S. A. in the Russian Far East through political, economic and cultural programs. In politics, it is first of all reaching understanding on the problem of international terrorism and working out strategies of anti-terrorist struggle: this issue, besides others, was discussed during the Summit meeting of the Pacific Rim countries' leaders in Shanghai in October 20-21, 2001. It is obvious that the U. S. tragedy of September 11, 2001 opened a new page in our political relations, which are now those of full recognition of the common danger and desire to work for annihilating the hot beds of terrorism and establishing peace on the earth. V. Putin's speech at the Summit and the questions concerning international terrorism that followed it fully proved the necessity to unite our efforts in this struggle. The Kremlin leader expressed determination of Russia to support the U. S. A. in all its efforts to eliminate the danger of further anti-human acts. It was unprecedented for the Asian-Pacific community which is wholly focused on economic problems to adopt a separate Declaration of the leaders on the struggle against terrorism, Russia being among the initiators of it. Strange as it may seem at first sight but this tragedy has made our two countries in many ways closer.

At the same time, there are some doubts concerning the scale of American struggle against terrorism. Today, in search of Osama Bin Laden, the U. S. A. has turned its military might against a number of countries which are territorially rather close to Russia, some former Soviet Socialist republics among them. The proximity of American technique causes anxiety on the Russian side, and, quite naturally, a question arises if this is really necessary for strengthening American rear. Besides, the threats of nuclear blows against such countries as Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea with which Russia has friendly relations cannot pass unnoticed either. The fact is that American people wholly support their government in this policy, thinking that it is done to pursue «terrorist number one». A partial answer to the above question can be found in American mass media which portray Russian deterrent as «more than adequate against the U.

>. nuclear arsenal, and vice versa. But that fact need no longer be enshrined in a treaty that is (most 30 years old and is a relic of a profoundly adversarial relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union» [5; 16-17]. In connection with this and some other facts of Russian-American relations, three factors, practically, disturb Russians: NATO expansion to the East, American efforts to establish control over some territories around Russia, and the nuclear treaty; they somehow hamper our cooperation in education and culture. But there is every hope for lessening these tensions during the visit of the American President to Moscow this year, besides, Russian-American meetings within the Pacific Rim countries' cooperation will also change the situation for the better.

As has been mentioned above, the Pacific Basin community was first of all formed as an economic organization, and new economic perspectives were outlined by a number of meetings (late: the Summit in Shanghai (October 20-21, 2001); the Forum of young specialists (Shanghai, July, 2001) where our Russian delegation was headed by I. E. Osokina, deputy minister of industry, science and technology; a meeting of women in Peking (August, 2001)). US free trade and investments are supposed to be created by 2010 for developed countries, and by 2020 — for developing states [3; 21]. There are common goals in promoting cooperation between Russia, the U. S. A. and other Pacific Rim countries through liberalization of trade and free investments. The American side expressed its readiness to accept Russia to Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation, and at present our two countries undertake mutual measures (maintaining economic growth and securing financial stability). For Russia, which entered the community only in November 1998, it is challenging to be involved into regional processes (through Siberia and the Far East, for the U. S. as a super power, it is a great chance of exerting control of a spacious area around the Pacific Ocean. From the beginning, Russia took part in the activities of the Pacific Rim countries on the sub-regional level. Thus in November, 1998, the governors of the Primorye and Khabarovsk Krai Ye. Nazdratenko and Ishayev together with the Prime Minister Ye. Primakov presented the Russian Federation to the Forum of the Pacific Rim countries in Kuala-Lumpur. This fact is suggestive of the growing activity of Far-Eastern local and regional authorities in cooperation with the USA, well as with other Pacific Rim countries at the end of the 1990s. Apart from the CPSU tradition, the newly formed and newly thinking local authorities made their efforts to establish strong links with the U. S. Our democratic tendencies in inner and foreign policies are used by new leaders to take advantage of contacts with such a powerful overseas neighbor as the U. S. A. In some cases the cooperation of local authorities of the two countries is really fruitful and mutually beneficial. But in others, unfortunately, it ended in little or no results. For example, a lot of attempts to create Russian and American coastal twin cities led into mere declarations. The links between Nakhodka and Oakland, Khabarovsk and Portland (Oregon) which were so promising in early 1990s, gradually came to nothing. In this connection the story of Vladivostok and its twin city San Diego can be told as a typical one. It is illustrative of the inefficiency of the two countries' attempts to arrange relations on the basis of mutually beneficial results. On the one hand, it was rather challenging (change delegations on different levels and sign a lot of protocols of intentions. On the other, life with its unpredictability interfered with all those intentions making them unrealizable. It was agreed to develop partnership on the level of marine bases and ports. But the results were diminished in both the cities and further cooperation was groundless. So after a turbulent start at the beginning of close cooperation, its activity was confined to usual cultural acts (TV-bridge, exhibitions, tours, etc.) [1; 132]. Only much later (in 1999)

did it become known that Americans were not trying to meet our Russian initiatives in making San-Diego and Vladivostok twin cities. There were other precedents of such failures in the development of twin cities relationships. On the whole, before opening the American Consulate in Vladivostok in 1992, separate links were not systematic, and individuals or delegations exchanges were rather chaotic.

Things began to alter in 1992, when a decision was made on the governmental level to «exchange» consulates, on the American side it was an act of good will and recognition of the growing role of the Russian Far East in the foreign policy of the U. S. A. In September 22, 1992 after some organizational formalities the American Consulate was open in Vladivostok. President George W. Bush the Senior sent a congratulation on account of the Stars and Stripes hoisting over Vladivostok again, alluding apparently to the meeting between Leonid Brezhnev and Gerald Ford in 1972. First and foremost the American Consulate pursued the goal of promoting Russian democratic reforms. For achieving it, the following four directions were outlined: a) expansion of international students exchange programs; b) training Russian specialists and rendering different kinds of humanitarian and technical aid; c) supporting business, investments and business transactions; d) overall promotion of commercial links.[1; 137].

As time went on, new ideas appeared and the activities of the American Consulate expanded. Among its aims was the mission of propagating American values and beliefs and also acquainting Russians with the principles of American freedom and democracy based on market economic relations. Today, one can fetch in the American Consulate library a number of booklets issued in the Russian language (as well as in English, of course), such as «Стратегии обучения демократии», «Вопросы демократии», «Прозрачность в системе власти. Как американские граждане влияют на государственную политику» and the like. These materials are very helpful to our students, they arouse a desire of open discussions and involuntary or intentional comparison of our economic and political systems. The value of such disputes can hardly be overestimated.

Of special interest for educationists, is certainly American aid to Russian students, teachers and scholars through various programs and exchanges. Thus, administrators and professors of America and Russia have developed a joint Masters of Business Administration degree program between California State University at Hayward, California State University in Pomona and Vladivostok State University of Economics (VSUE). The two American Universities have, since 1993, helped more than 300 top-quality Russian students study business methods and more than 150 have completed the program successfully. Considering the large number of grants won by the students of the Foreign Languages Institute, VSUE is the first in the Far East. It is the only university of Russia that has won the right to send its students to take part in the Global Business Challenge competition where they have made successful presentations and acquired a rich experience in cross-cultural communication and learnt some lessons of global thinking. As winners of the Global Business Challenge competition the students of VSUE are regularly invited to it. Today, a new program called «Partnership» sponsored by the U. S. Agency of International Development has announced its readiness to support long-term Russian-American cooperation. VSUE with its long-standing relations with the U. S. A. is a potential participant of this program.

Russian students also become leaders through the Model United Nations. The Model United Nations programs allow students to participate in model sessions of the United Nations to advance their understanding of the principles of maintaining international relations. The Russian visit was part of the Model United nations of the Russia Far East (MUNRFE)

which had been established in Khabarovsk two years before. Another goal of Model United Nations was for the students to develop an understanding of foreign countries. The delegation of eight students from Russia Far East participated in discussing the topics offered, and presented the country of Colombia. In general the points for debating included Palestine, globalization, global security, and regionalism. Another goal of the conference held in San Francisco in April 2002 was to present the students' ideas to other students back in Russia, prepare them for the first International Conference in Khabarovsk later this year [4].

Of great help to Far Eastern educational institutions (schools, colleges, universities, etc.) is the activity of the Peace Corps, a civilian organization formed on the initiative of President John F. Kennedy, that sends volunteers to instruct citizens of developing countries in the execution of industrial, agricultural, educational and health programs. Its representatives are instructing Russian students in the spirit of freedom and democracy, they introduce such important ideas of cooperation as team work and club work. Among their achievements is involvement of students into publishing University papers in the English language. One of the Peace Corps representatives Thomas F. Wold, who worked in VSUE, believed « a free press — that he published media of free communication — is a very, very important part of a mature society» and he thought that «a free press in house publication is an absolutely essential part of every institution of higher learning worthy of the name of «University» [6; 1]. The activity of the Peace Corps members is in full harmony with the innovative technologies that are now being widely discussed and efficiently introduced in VSUE and other universities in Primorye. A university, according to G. Lazarev, is a dynamically developing system (in fields of teaching and renovating knowledge), and as such it should prepare specialists of future, those who would be able to facilitate progress in all spheres of human activity [2]; So the Peace Corps representatives by their research projects facilitate scientific growth of teachers of English, supervise the students' research work, participate as speakers and competent judges in different conferences and seminars. So it can be remarked that the role of the American Consulate in Vladivostok is extremely great in encouraging a lot of projects in the sphere of culture and education.

Despite some complexities in Russian-American political relations, one general conclusion can be made with regard to positive experiences in the U. S. and Russia. Thus, «Shanghai Summit» was used by Russia to inform the whole world about its economic and political situation, to confirm its readiness to enter the world integration, its openness to mutually beneficial cooperation. The prospects of our future coordination will be discussed in Vladivostok: it will play host to the Asian-Pacific 7th Investment symposium and an Ecological conference: it will be held in September 2002. The forthcoming meeting of Russian and American presidents Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush will definitely outline the issues of mutual interest: bilateral relations, trade relations, regional problems, educational challenges and areas of cooperation in all spheres.

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