

SUMMARY

This article examines Russia's perspectives on the Japanese "soft power" and changing U.S.-Japan alliance. To understand them properly several critical considerations should be taken into account.

Firstly, Moscow clearly distinguishes the U.S. as a leading partner in the U.S.-Japan alliance, and thus considers Washington's global policy priorities as a defining factor that may affect Russian security interests in the Asia Pacific. In this context it is worth mentioning that though Russian–American interests mostly coincide in this part of the world, bilateral differences and growing conflicts elsewhere, especially in Europe, may impede their security and economic cooperation in East Asia. Secondly, Russian–Japanese ties are characterized by a controversy: on one hand, during the last fifteen years a network of bilateral contacts (political and economic ties, military and cultural exchanges, etc.) has been gradually growing. On the other hand, a long-term territorial dispute has prevented any substantial breakthrough in bilateral relations.

From this author's point of view, the complex state of Russian–American relations that is poisoned by such issues as the NATO enlargement, Washington's abrogation of the Antiballistic Missile Treaty, American plans to install National Missile Defense in Eastern Europe informs Moscow's perspective on the American role in the U.S.-Japan alliance. This analysis examines how the American use of hard power as well as soft power has changed Russia's post-Cold War policy, and what that experience says about the effectiveness of the use of those two components of "smart" power. The article then discusses differences in Russian and Japanese approaches to the territorial dispute and the latest changes in bilateral economic ties as a precursor of a possible Moscow-Tokyo compromise to support further strengthening of bilateral relations. This is followed by a discussion of Russia's assessment of the main components of Japan's soft power, and the evolution of the U.S.-Japan security alliance.