

EXPERT ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION BY SCHOLARS, BUSINESSMEN AND DECISION MAKERS (BASED ON RESULTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERT SURVEY IN THE APR FOR THE PERIOD 2005–2016)

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Abstract

The article reveals the role of the subjective factor in decision-making in the international sphere, based on analysis of the results of surveys the opinions of experts and decision makers from 16 countries of the Asia-Pacific region. The main objective of the study was to identify the views of the experts on the characteristics of the situation in the Asia Pacific region: economy, security, risks and threats and ways to overcome them, and most importantly – the main directions of the cooperation of the Asia-Pacific countries with Russia and methods of their implementation.

The results of international surveys formed the empirical dataset for determining the main objectives of the administrative decision-making process aimed at the development of partnership relations between Russia and APR countries and their implementation. The decision makers were provided with information about how our country and its actions are seen by our Eastern partners, what is approved of and what is apprehended. The Information can be used for building and adjusting the image of Russia abroad for promoting the effective cooperation and coordination of the interests of the countries in the region.

Keywords: process of the decision making, subjective factor, decision maker, Asia Pacific Region, international expert surveys.

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Effective information and analytical support for the strategic planning activities of government departments and business structures is a very important and delicate sphere. It sets stringent requirements for the information provided: efficiency, reliability, ethic, privacy.

When this concerns the optimization of international activities, it is mandatory to take into account the regional and national characteristics of the foreign partners, identifying their attitude to our country and its activities in these regions, – first and foremost, the opinions of decision makers. Particularly stringent requirements should be set for strategies as founding documents and forecasts, directing and correcting these strategies.

The APR is of great interest to researchers. However, in our view, the most fundamental and long-lasting are the studies of the Pacific Forum. Particularly promising are the analytical reports by Forum President Ralph A. Cossa and Director of Research Brad Glosserman.

Research from the Pacific Forum enables us to comprehend the main directions of development and regional problems: US-China relations (Carl Baker, Ralph A. Cossa, Gaoyue Fan, Vivian Brailey Fritschi, Brad Glosserman, Bonnie S. Glaser, Jane Skanderup, Snyder Scott), U.S.-Japan relations (Michael H. Armacost, Brad Glosserman, Mataka Kamiya, Jane Skanderup), China and the South Pacific (Eric Teo Chu Cheow, Fergus Hanson, Ronald Rodriguez,), U.S.-ROK relations (Ralph A. Cossa, Scott Snyder), North Korea (Aidan-Foster Carter, Ralph A. Cossa, Gordon Flake, Bonnie S. Glaser, Larry A. Niksch, Yuki Tatsumi, Scott Savitz), Taiwan problem (Yu Bin, Ralph A. Cossa, Andrew Yang, Chih-Cheng Lo, Derek Mitchell, Robert Sutter), Indonesia (Ralph A. Cossa, Bilveer Singh, Anthony Smith), Myanmar (Bradley O. Babson), Philippines (Mely Caballero-Anthony), Thailand (J.C. Lumbaca), China-Singapore relations (Eric Teo Chu Cheow), and Mongolia (Steve Noerper) etc.

However, even with the variety of research on the Asia-Pacific, the expert surveys conducted by our project – in non-stop mode using 70% of the longitudinal research data, – have no equivalents in Russia or the wider world.

The interest of the Russian Federation which is located on the European and Asian continents to the Eastern direction it is due to the fact that the Asia-Pacific region is presently the fastest growing region in the world. It is projected that in 2020 more than 50% of the world's GDP will be produced by the countries in the East and South-East of Asia. The countries of this region account for a significant share of global energy consumption. The other main consumers are such giants as the US, China and Russia.

During the implementation of the international project “Dialogue Partnership as a Factor of Stability and Integration”, we conducted an international expert survey to assess the situation in the Far East and in the Asia-Pacific region from 2005 up to the present time. The experts are highly qualified specialists and VIPs (decision makers) from 16 countries: Russia, China, USA, Japan, Brunei, Vietnam, India, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines (government officials, scholars, politicians, diplomats, economists, businessmen, military officers, journalists, representatives of non-governmental organizations, etc.).

The International project “Dialogue Partnership as the Factor of Stability and Integration” (“The Bridge between the East and the West”) was set up in late December 1988 – and ran until early 1989 and includes four programs: 1) Oil and Gas Resources in the Context of Energy Security, 2) Security and Counterterrorism, 3) Conflict Resolution and Inter-ethnic Relations, and 4) Cultural and Educational Programs. In 2000 the project received international status. Scholars from 20 countries participated in the project.

We began the Asia Pacific research direction in 2004, when Dr. Larissa S. Ruban, head of the project, participated in a course at the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies. In 2005 Dr. Ruban, through a grant from the economic program POSCO of the East-West Center (Honolulu, USA), carried out the project “Russian Oil Exports to Northeast Asia as the Factor of Stability and Cooperation in the Region”. This project includes a “pilotage” survey of 24 experts from 7 countries of the APR: Russia, USA, China, Japan, Republic of Korea, India and Mongolia. Since 2008 the survey has included participating experts from Malaysia; since 2009 – from Vietnam and the Philippines; since 2010 – from Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand; since 2011 – from Brunei and Nepal; and since 2013 – from Myanmar. Since 2013 100 experts from 16 countries of the APR have participated every year.

It should be noted that the Eastern elite is a very closed structure which is difficult for external actors to penetrate and receive information from. However, in the framework of the international project «Dialogue partnership as factor of stability and integration» («a Bridge between the East and the West») long-term close contact was established with experts and the excellent reputation of the project allowed them to receive information whilst protecting respondents’ confidentiality.

Experts give a comprehensive description of the situation in the Asia Pacific region based on the development of their countries (their cumulative potential), determine the level of security in the Asia Pacific region, the risks and threats, the possibility of conflicts, characterize the hierarchy of countries (in respect to leadership) and the international organization of the region (in terms of efficiency), indicate the need for energy resources, and offer the best routes for the transportation of hydrocarbons, including the Eastern direction of hydrocarbon exports.

The surveys are primarily aimed at finding optimal ways for cooperation between the countries in the region and outside powers, identification of effective methods and mechanisms for developing cooperation and strengthening integration, as well as eliminating risks and threats that impede this integration. The surveys are carried out in the form of continuous monitoring and are complemented by statistical data and content analysis from publications in specialized media and research literature.

We present the results of the surveys. The current situation in the Asia-Pacific region is assessed by 59% of the experts as stable, by 19% as the relatively stable, and by 22% as unstable due to local conflict.

Table 1 below shows the dynamics of expert opinion since 2005, when the prevailing assessment of the situation was as unstable (54%). However, from

2008 the majority of experts began to assess the situation in the region as stable in varying degrees.

Table 1

Situation in APR, %

Answers \ Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
1) Situation is stable	42	40	39	24	65	54	43	49	48	53	53	53
2) Situation is relatively stable						18	26	12	14	11	14	14
3) Situation is not stable	54	52	51	13	10	10	19	16	14	14	18	18

Source: Data base Ruban L.S. (Results of the expert survey).

Regarding the risks and threats that destabilize the situation in the Asia-Pacific region, the experts named the following:

Table 2

Risks and threats, %

N	Answers \ Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
1	Nuclear weapon of North Korea	54	64	73	31	37	33	50	46	39	38	40	44
2	Competition for energy resources	13	40	51	62	29	33	46	54	60	62	64	64
3	Anthropogenic disasters							26	26	28	30	30	30
4	Natural disasters							26	26	27	27	27	27
5	Taiwan problem	30	40	54	18	17	10	18	12	6	3		
6	Climate change						6	5	5	6	6	5	5
7	Environmental pollution	13	13	15	20	4	6	5	8	9	9	14	14
8	International crime: narcotraffic, piracy, etc.	22	8	12	12	6	6	2	6	6	7	6	6

Source: Data base Ruban L.S. (Results of the expert survey).

One of the examples of an aggravation of the situation due to the increased competition for energy resources and the territory they possess, as stated by the experts, is the worsening situation in the South China Sea concerning ownership of the Paracel and Spratly Islands, where the dispute is between China, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei and Taiwan.

Based on these estimates, the experts made predictions about the possibility or impossibility of the onset of military conflict.

Table 3 shows a positive trend: a decrease in the number of assessments about the possibility of military conflict from 54% in 2005 to 13% in 2012 and to 10% in 2014–2016, and an increase in the estimates on the impossibility of a military conflict in the Asia Pacific from 42% in 2005 to 74% in 2012.

Table 3

Possibility of the military conflict in APR, %

Answers \ Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
1 group: No, military conflict is unlikely in APR now	42	40	39	58	67	68	60	74	72	70	70	68
2 group: Yes, military conflict is likely in APR now	54	52	51	22	16	3	10	13	13	10	10	10
Middle opinion: military conflict is unlikely in APR now, but situation can change due to the existence of risks and threats	4	8	10	17	16	20	30	13	15	19	20	22

Source: Data base Ruban L.S. (Results of the expert survey).

These likelihood estimates decreased in connection with the nuclear testing in North Korea in 2013 to 72%, in 2014–2015 to 70% and in 2016 to 68%.

Answers to the expert’s question: “How did the situation in the far East and the Asia-Pacific region change?” are important in the sense that European and Asian mentalities differ. Very often we and our Asian partners perceive the same events in a different way, so the answers to this question not only state the changes occurring in the region, they also reveal how they are evaluated by the representatives of Asia-Pacific countries, indicating which events are assessed as positive. The knowledge of these assessments and the assessment criteria used by our partners, will allow us to effectively build a foreign policy in the Eastern direction and subsequently its energy component, in order that Russian energy policy is not perceived as a severe energy expansion, threatening its neighbors and forcing them to do certain things under pressure from the “energy switch”.

The departure from a clear USA – Soviet Union confrontation and the transition from a hostile relationship with China to a strategic partnership with that country was attributed by the experts to positive changes in the far East and Northeast Asia in comparison with the previous period. They noted the effectiveness of the prudent and pragmatic policies of China, which focused on economic interests, not ideological differences. The major conclusion made by the experts: “The main positive point is the relative stability in the region, as the parties understand the consequences of conflict and its aggravation”.

What advice is given by the experts to the Russian experts leading negotiations with Asian partners?

A Number of Russian experts (2005–2007) paid attention to the fact that controversial issues should be approached in a sober and non-ideologized way and not only in terms of concessions. The difficulty is that often the persons negotiating and making critical decisions confuse the assignment with a compromise, and after making a concession, wait in vain to get something in return (Kompleksnaya kharakteristika situatsii v ATR, p. 174).

In theory of effective negotiations it is clearly indicated that compromise involves getting one thing in return for another. The concession is giving something without compensation, without receiving anything in return. Concessions are made to demonstrate goodwill, to form positive public opinion. A concession can be made by a strong party to demonstrate good intentions, or a weak party, knowing that unless the concession is made, the object of controversy will be withdrawn. And it is very important not to be mistaken with assessments and to give an adequate assessment of the situation in order to defend one’s interests (Yuri, 1992, p. 5)

Moreover, a negotiator should always remember the national interests of their country and not be afraid to say “no” when the conditions are disadvantageous or even dangerous tonational interests. Never underestimate or overestimate the other side. Our Asian partners (this concerns Japan, China, and South Korea) always negotiate from a tough standpoint of their national interests, which they will never compromise. Russia has yet to learn from them such a persevering stance in defending their national interests (Kompleksnaya kharakteristika situatsii v ATR, p. 174).

Never forget about the specificity of the Asian partners and neither attributes your traits to them, nor expect from them actions and proposals falling into our logic.

They are different: they have different history, culture, traditions, and a different perception. And they have a different logic. For them it is logical and fair if that serves the realization of their interests. It is impossible to impose European perceptions and European standards. They recognize only strong partners without the slightest weakness, and will pull out one concession after another, coming back for concessions again and again. Only a strong partner will be considered as equal by them. The international legal instruments will not stop them when the situation changes. They are ready to interpret any document to their advantage, and will easily review and change partners and coalitions. Hard pragmatism lies at the core of all their actions (ibid.).

The assessments of the hierarchy and leadership in the Asia Pacific countries revealed the following results:

Table 4 clearly captures the change in the positions of the leading States in terms of influence in Northeast, Southeast and South Asia in the period from 2005 to 2016.

Table 4

Leadership in APR, %

Country Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
USA	1)84	3)56	3)51	3)47	3)37	3)34	3)47	2-3)31	2-3)30	3)41	3)40	3)40
China	2)72	1)86	1)87	1)100	1)100	1)90	1)95	1)96	1)95	1)93	1)92	1)92
Japan	3)48	2)61	2)62	2)51	2)41	2)37	2)54	2-3)31	2-3)30	2)43	2)43	2)43
Russia	4)32	4)42	4)43	4)38	4)24	4)25	4)23	4)18	4)17	4)15	4)14	4)14
Republic of Korea	5)28	5)24	5)24	5)18	5)15	5)12	5)19	5)17	5)16	5)14	4)14	4)14

Source: Data base Ruban L.S. (Results of the expert survey).

From 2005, the experts noted that there was an active struggle for dominance in the region between the US and China. Back then, China was rapidly catching up with the US in terms of development, which was a success and has since become a leader in North-East Asia as stated in the responses of the experts (answers from 2006–2016).

After more than three decades of reforms China four-times doubled its gross domestic product per capita, i.e., increased its economic potential by 16 times.

Chinese experts predict that by 2020 China will have the world's largest economy, will overtake the US in economic terms, and its GDP will exceed the US GDP by 1.04–1.74 times.

Active development brought Japan to second place in the region's leadership in 2006, moving the US into third place in terms of importance and influence in Northeast Asia. Despite the crisis in 2008–2009 and the disaster in 2011, Japan has managed to maintain this position, and in 2012 it shared 2nd – 3rd place with the US.

Russia's position has not changed – it remained in 4th place with 23%, as in 2011, 15% – in 2014 and 14% – in 2015–2016.

South Korea stays at the 5th place during the entire period – 19% and 14% – in 2014–2016.

Regarding Russia's role in the region, the range of experts' opinion is very wide. Five percent of the experts assessed our country as a great power with great potential: "Russia is a great power, it is not a balancer and not a regional power", "Russia is also a leader in APR, it possesses nuclear weapons and large armed forces, the enormous resource potential, and, primarily – energy" (Answers of the experts from China in 2012–2016).

Forty-six percent of the experts indicated that the role of Russia in the Asia Pacific region is very small, although it has a high technological potential and rich resources, a developed defense industry and nuclear weapons. But Russia lost many positions which were taken in the region by the Soviet Union. The Russian experts also noted that our interest in the Asia-Pacific region is big; we want to be there and to play a significant role, but strength is not enough. Russia has been negotiating with ASEAN for a long time. A lot of words, but the results are still very scarce (20% of responses from the Russian experts).

Indonesian experts said that it is necessary to understand and take into account local peculiarities, to understand the Asian way of institutional development, because intercultural dialogue by the participants of the communication process is needed for the stability and confidence-building. ASEAN and Russia have signed a number of documents. We must remember that the focus on cooperation in Asia envisaged by the treaties has been increased due to the huge market capacity and rates of production in the region.

The experts emphasized that Russia can play the stabilizing role in the economy, energy, and security (peacekeeping, combating international crime and prevention of military conflicts) in the Far East and Asia Pacific. Only 4% of experts said that our country will be able to play the role of balancer between the U.S. and China.

All of the Chinese experts talked about close and fruitful cooperation with Russia, and stressed that in the North-East Asia region, the Russian Federation should first and foremost have cooperation in the energy sector with China, stating that oil, gas and electricity cooperation is Russia's strong point, and in the field of Micropower (it is the PRC strong point), it is needed to develop cooperation in science, technology, and to make wider exchanges in scientists and students.

The general opinion of experts on the characteristics of Russia was vividly expressed at the Moscow urban forum in December 2014: "You go at a high speed on his ship and at the same time you build it" (*Kompleksnaya kharakteristika situatsii v ATR*, p. 49).

All of the experts noted that China is the leader in the region. It is the largest consumer of oil, gas and energy. It obtains a lot of this from Russia and intends to increase this export. China is the second largest importer of oil and energy after the United States. In July 2011, China for the first time in history surpassed the United States in its reliance on foreign supplies of oil.

At the moment, the largest oil producers in the Asia-Pacific region are China, Indonesia and Malaysia, while the biggest gas-producers are Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand.

Expert opinion on effective areas of cooperation in the energy sector is unanimous. Russia's oil and gas export is efficient in North-East Asia, China, the Republic of Korea, Japan, and possibly in India (TAPI pipeline), but the Afghanistan issue needs to be resolved.

Experts from South-East Asia stressed that as their countries have their own oil and gas, the optimal areas for cooperation with Russia include joint

exploration and development of oil and gas fields, and development of transport communications and the downstream. They noted that the Russian Federation has level nuclear technology and the best and most advanced nuclear power stations in the world, and expressed interest in cooperating with Russia in this sphere.

The experts expressed the solid opinion that the development of the economic integration of the Asia Pacific countries will contribute to the solution of one of the most important questions of resource and energy security for sustainable development in the region. And here the opinions of experts are unanimous: energy cooperation is the basis for integration, prosperity and security in the region.

Regarding Russia's role in the Asia Pacific region, the range of expert opinions was broad throughout the entire period of the poll: 38% in 2005 and 19% in 2010 to 7% in 2014 and 5% in 2015–2016, said that Russia can be a strong partner only as a stabiliser to balance the development of the region, to maintain peace and prevent armed conflicts, and to ensure energy security and economic cooperation. This means that the potential of the Russian Federation is not enough for unilateral action, its power will be only in the Alliance, and much will depend on how well and efficiently the alliance will be built and the partners will be selected.

- 36% of experts in 2005 68% in 2014–2015 and 70% in 2016 – pointed out that Russia had lost the position taken by the Soviet Union in the region, but now its capacity in the APR is lower;
- 4% of experts in 2005 16% in 2008 and 6% in 2012 assessed Russia as a middle-range player less important than the US, China and Japan, but more important than the Republic of Korea, indicating that the strength of Russia increases in a coalition with China.

As of 2014–2016 there were no such responses, perhaps due to the weakening of world leaders and the growth of the position of the Republic of Korea, which in terms of leadership has received the same number of expert estimates as Russia (14%).

Two extreme positions defining Russia as a great power (this until recently was the opinion of the Vietnamese, Chinese and Mongolian colleagues) and characterizing the role of Russia in the Asia Pacific region as small and even tiny, in 2014 got 1%: and the answers of Chinese experts on Russia as the leader in the Asia Pacific region by 2014, almost disappeared, and then in 2015–2016 dramatically increased to 68%.

Table 5 shows the data of the expert survey on the role of Russia in the Far East and in the Asia Pacific region in the period from 2005 to 2016.

The data in Table 6 show that collective, group and individual assessment of leadership in the countries diverge sharply. When evaluating the United States, Chinese experts reveal the decrease in rating the US as the leader in Asia Pacific from 50% in 2006 to 21% in 2012–2013 and to 20% in 2014–2016. The assessments of the Russian experts regarding the US are higher than that of the Chinese, but it has also revealed a decline from 70% in 2006 to 34% in 2012 and 50–52% in 2013–2014 to 46% in 2015–2016 accordingly.

Table 5

The answers of the experts on the question about the role of Russia in the Far East and Asia Pacific Region, %

N	Answers	Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
1	Russia lost the position taken by the Soviet Union in the APR		36	45	49	42	26	28	37	42	65	68	68	70
2	Positive changes compared to the period of rigid confrontation between the U.S. - Japan – Soviet Union, with the PRC Russia moved towards a strategic partnership		12	12	18	25	67	12	18					
3	Russia started to carry out more stringent stat policy, gaining strength and weight in the Far East, working closely with APEC and participates in the SCO. The government pays more attention to the Far East trying to rebuild the economy		12	12	12	18	16	10	10					
4	In partnership with India and China, Russia can impact the strategic balance in the Asia Pacific region		4	12	12	25	25	6	6	3	2	2	2	2
5	Russia does not have capacity and means for the development of Siberia and the Far East. Japan, China, South Korea and the United States have such potential and means, so they, along with Russia need to cultivate these areas and develop mineral resources		8	8	9	8	1	3	2					
6	Russia in the Far East is a middle-range player in the Far East less important than the USA, China and Japan, but more important than South Korea		4	8	9	16	6	4	3	6	8			
7	The role of Russia in APR is small, it has not kept pace with the development of the region					10	16	17	11	2	2	2		
8	Russia is a great power, neither a balancer nor a regional power			2	6	6	11	6	5	3	1	1	1	1
9	Small, tiny										1	1	1	1

Source: Data base Ruban L.S. (Results of the expert survey).

Table 6

**Experts assessments of the US, China and Russia positions
in the period 2005–2016, %**

Answers Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
USA all	1) 84	3) 56	3) 51	3) 47	3) 37	3) 34	3) 47	2–3) 40	2–3) 40	3) 41	3) 40	3) 40
American		66	25	30	45	22	66	67	80	80	92	92
Chinese		50	46	45	12	28	27	21	21	20	20	20
Russian		70	48	48	43	40	46	34	50	52	46	46
China all	2) 72	1) 86	1) 87	1) 100	1) 100	1) 90	1) 95	1) 90	1) 92	1) 93	1) 92	92
American		66	60	90	100	85	67	66	100	100	100	100
Chinese		100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Russian		100	100	100	100	100	100	84	82	81	80	80
Japan all	3) 48	2) 61	2) 62	2) 51	2) 41	2) 37	2) 54	2–3) 40	2–3) 40	2) 43	2) 43	2) 43
RF all	4) 32	4) 42	4) 43	4) 38	4) 24	4) 25	4) 23	4) 18	4) 17	4) 15	4) 14	4) 14
American		not	25	not	10	11	not	not	not	not	not	not
Chinese		50	96	90	60	71	40	14	14	14	28	68
Russian		29	50	50	14	13	13	11	8	9	12	14
South Korea	5) 28	5) 24	5) 24	5) 18	5) 20	5) 12	5) 19	5) 17	5) 16	5) 14	4) 14	4) 14

Source: Data base Ruban L.S. (Results of the expert survey).

The assessment by the American experts regarding U.S. dominance is curved: 66% in 2006, then a decrease to 25% in 2008, a slight increase in 2008 to 30% and 45% in 2009, and then again a decline in 2010 to 10% followed by a sharp increase to 66–67% in 2011–2012, and 80% in 2013–2014. It should be noted that in 2015–2016 the assessment by the Americans of the leadership of their country reached a 92% peak. That is, the worse the economic and financial situations in the country, the higher the ambitions are.

The assessment of the leadership of the PRC by the Chinese experts is clear – 100% over the whole period of the surveys. The Russian experts between 2006 and 2011 gave 100% to the Chinese leadership, and only in 2012–2013–2014–2015–2016 was there a decrease to 84%-82%-81%-80%. Assessments by the American experts on the positions of China gradually increase to 66%-60%-90%-100% in 2006–2007–2008–2009 (respectively), then drop to 85%-67%-66% in 2010–2011–2012, and then again reach 100% in 2013–2016 (when China passed the peak of its development).

As for the role of Russia in the Asia Pacific region, the lowest ratings are given by Russian experts:

- the decline was from 50% in 2007 to 9–8% in 2013–2014,
- also a sharp decline is typical for the Chinese assessments, from 96% in 2007 to 14% in 2012–2014,
- then there was an increase to 28% in 2015 and 68% in 2016.

American experts, with rare exceptions in 2007, 2009 and 2010, did not assess Russia as a leader in the Asia Pacific region.

Russia was assessed by the Vietnamese, Mongolian and Chinese experts as a “great power”. Moreover, such responses of Chinese experts by 2014 almost disappeared, and then in 2015–2016 skyrocketed to 68%.

Thus, we see how the geopolitical situation in the Asia-Pacific and in the all world was changed. Russia needs to take into account these changes and global challenges in the relationships with partners in the Asia Pacific region developing.

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