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*Russian-Japanese Relations in quest for normalization:
a Comparative Foreign Policies Analysis*

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“We expect a high-quality progress with regard to relations with our eastern neighbor, Japan. We welcome the aspiration of the state’s government to develop economic ties with Russia, to launch joint projects and programs.”

*Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin,
annual State of the Nation
Address to the Federal
Assembly, 2016*

“President Putin visited my hometown of Nagato last December. President Putin and I spoke with each other for five hours. We firmly decided to look ahead instead of looking back, [...] the history of the Japanese-Russian relations entered a new era at that time.”

*Shinzo Abe, Vladivostok Eastern
Economic Forum, September 7,
2017*

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Introduction

After the end of the bipolar world, the states had to face new challenges and to compete, or cooperate, for a new multipolar world order. Indeed, the Eurasian continent is the one subjected to the most sudden changes: the soaring economies of the Asian countries, the growing population, the rearmament of new rising powers, the unsolved historical problems and the confrontation with the West made the region one of the most interesting and stimulating areas of observation and research for the present and the years to come, despite in Europe there is still a little focus on the Eurasian dynamics.

This is the reason of the choice of this macro-area of research. The reason why I decided to analyze the bilateral ties of Russia and Japan, lies in the peculiarity of the relations the two countries have, and their relevance on the international arena. On one hand, Russia, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and almost a decade of recovery, is a restoring great power which regained global influence and attention thanks to its intervention in Syria and the Crimean annexation, which eventually deteriorated the relations with the West and gave an impulse to the Asian vector of the Russian foreign policy. On the other hand, Japan is a state which is striving to reaffirm its regional power, and trying not to succumb to the Chinese influence. Moreover, Japan represents the most loyal ally of the US in the Pacific region, providing a strategic outpost for the US army.

Furthermore, Japan and Russia are bounded by an ironic fate: despite theoretically they could be natural allies in the pursuing and consolidation of a multipolar balance, the two states never signed a peace agreement because of the Kuril Islands territorial dispute, unsolved since the end of WWII. Nevertheless, in the last year the two nations have made great progresses in the fields of economic cooperation, aimed to solve the dispute. This makes the topic of this research even more relevant nowadays.

The aim of this research, thus, is to demonstrate how the interests of Russia and Japan are not potentially conflicting, analyze the role and relevance of the Kuril

Islands issue in the bilateral ties, explaining why, despite the absence of a peace treaty, the two countries could manage to cooperate and what are their limits and elements of disturbance. Moreover, there will be analyzed the latest developments and solutions regarding the territorial dispute. In the first chapter the main outlines of the foreign policy of both country will be analyzed, focusing on the long-term objectives and considering the regional alliances and economic ties of Russia and Japan with the neighboring countries. The analysis, moreover, will be divided on three levels (one for each paragraph), starting from the most general principles of the state, passing through the outline of the regional interests and ending with an introspective analysis of the Russian-Japanese bilateral ties. In this chapter, concerning the methodology, the behavior of both states will be explained through the lenses of two different theories of the international relations: the neoclassical realism and the identity theory of the constructivist school. I chose these two paradigms for two reasons. Firstly, according to the academic tradition, Russia is a realist actor, while Japan a constructivist one. Thus, I wanted to remark the relevance of these interpretations for my work, while I try to explain their behavior in the international arena. However, there are elements in Russian foreign policy formulations that fit in the constructivism paradigm, as well as Japan has realist characteristics that influence its decision making process. This research, thus, has the objective to contextualize the Russian and Japanese concepts of foreign policy, highlighting how the two states have more in common than it could be expected.

The second chapter will be dedicated to the thorny issue of the Kuril Islands territorial dispute. Will be provided a brief historical reconstruction of the origins of the dispute, with a special focus on the end of WWII and the San Francisco Peace Conference. The chapter then will analyze the role of negotiations and diplomacy during the last decades of opening and rapprochement of the two countries, trying to find the elements that prevented Russia and Japan to conclude a proper peace treaty and to solve the issue. Moreover, the chapter will focus on the latest developments, and the achievements reached during the Putin presidency and Abe's premiership.

The third and last chapter is a case study which will analyze how Russia and Japan react to a regional issue of national security, in this case the North Korean nuclear threat. Both states have a special relation with North Korea, be it positive or negative, and together with China, South Korea and the US, in the 2000s tried to shape an institutional architecture for regional security and the safeguard of stability through the Six-Party Talks. Thus, the chapter will briefly analyze the history of North Korea and the role of its ideology in the state-building process, in order to understand its moves in the international arena. Furthermore, the chapter will focus on the interests of Russia and Japan in the Korean Peninsula, showing once again that the two states have common long-term objectives and could benefit from cooperation. However, as showed in the Six-Party Talks meetings, Russia and Japan didn't manage to find a common ground and influence the process of the talks because of a series of reasons, as the failure of Japanese diplomacy, its decision taking mechanism and the meddling of the US.

For what concerns the sources, I chose both Russian, Japanese and Western sources, in order to have a more comprehensive view on the relation and provide the point of view of both countries. Since this thesis does not want to be neither pro-Japanese neither pro-Russia, the realization of a complete and impartial research can be accomplished only considering both parties' positions. The sources I used include official documents of Japan and Russia, as the *White Book of Defense* (for Japan) and the *Russian Foreign Policy concept*. A lot of material was also provided by the official sites of the respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs, by the MGIMO library and archives, in which I had the occasion to study during my stay in Moscow, and by the *Государственная Публичная Историческая Библиотека России* (State Historic Public Library of Russia). Along with that, I also used scientific publications and books of Russian experts of Japan and Russian Foreign Policy, as Dmitry Streltsov (who I had the chance to interview), Georgy Toloraya, Anatoly Torkunov and others who collaborated with Russian think-thanks as the RIAC (Russian International Affairs Council) or the Carnegie Moscow Center and Japanese experts of Russia, as Kazuhiko Togo, a Japanese diplomat who took part

in the negotiations for the Kuril Islands and a former visiting professor to MGIMO. The basic knowledges that allowed me to analyze the past and the present of Russian Foreign Policy, in particular, have been provided by the courses held in MGIMO by major experts as Tatiana Shakleina and Andrey Sushentsov.

The motivation of my research is prompted by the desire and hopes to provide to Western audience a different interpretation of Russian foreign policy, in the hope to make Russia more understandable for Europe and that, in the future, the European Union and Russia will restore their relations to the previous level. Moreover, it wants to cast a light over the dynamics of the Far East and the consequent opportunities, which are underestimated in Europe and especially in Italy. Thus, this thesis wants to bring to the attention of Italian scholars the relevance of the Asian-Pacific Region, explaining the latest developments, in the hope that, in the near future, Italy could use its soft power and its positive relations with Russia and Japan to improve its diplomatic relevance on the global arena.

Why Russia and Japan? Indeed, the deepening of my personal knowledge on Russia started at the beginning of my experience at MGIMO, which allowed me to have a different, internal point of view on various areas, from the historical to the economic, from the political to the cultural. Studying Russia directly in Russia, in the university which formed generations of Soviet and Russian diplomats and experts, is a completely different experience, since the everyday contact with the Russian environment highly contributed to inspire this work. Concerning Japan, as I am also interested in Asian geopolitics, culture and history, I chose to focus on the relations that Russia had with Tokyo, due to their peculiarity and paradoxes, as the fact that they still didn't have sign a peace treaty, the duality of their culture or the shadow of the United States that influences their relations. Indeed, the latest developments of bilateral ties, made the Russian-Japanese relations a topic of actuality, that cannot be ignored by the academic and political community, especially if we consider the players and powers that act in the Asian-Pacific Region and, in particular, in North-East Asia.

Chapter I

Comparative analysis of Japanese and Russian foreign policy strategy

The understanding of the contemporary relations between Russia and Japan implies the analysis of the foreign policy strategy of the respective countries. For this reason, this first chapter will be dedicated mostly to the interpretation of the official documents, declaration and political statements, both of the Kremlin and the *Kantei*, providing their point of view to the reader. It will follow a specular structure, developed on three levels. In the first part, it will focus on Japan, taking a closer look to its foreign policy on three different plains: it will start with a general overview and principles, then it will summarize its policy in the East Asia-Pacific region and the bilateral relations with the other neighboring countries, while the third subchapter will analyze the relations between Russia and Japan in an historical retrospective and how they changed, adopting a Japanese point of view. This will allow the reader to enter into the Japanese mindset, providing more instruments for a proper interpretation. The second part will follow a similar pattern.

Japan, being an insular country, is characterized by the unicity and peculiarity of a culture that developed by its own. These elements, which accompanied Japanese society and culture throughout centuries until nowadays, can be find in its history and politics, as it always distinguished itself from neighboring countries such as China and Korea. After over two centuries of *Sakoku*¹ (literarily, “closed country”), the isolationist foreign policy of the Tokugawa Shogunate (1600-1868) which consolidated even further Japanese singularity, Japan opened itself to world politics. The defeat in WWII and the special relation it established with the United States, in terms of dependence on security², enhanced its singular status of world power.

¹ 1633-39, 1853.

² The Treaty of San Francisco of 1951 prevented Japan to have its own military forces. However, because of the spread of Communism in Asia and the power of the Soviet Union, it was allowed to establish an army with the sole purpose of self-defense.

Nevertheless, under the US wing during the period of the Cold War, Japan managed to become the second-largest economy by GDP (now third), the fourth-largest by PPP and the fourth-largest world importer and exporter. Along economic achievements, Japan also fully integrated into the international arena, being member of the UN since its foundation, of the OECD, G7, G8 and G20. It is also considered to be an advanced democracy, and usually is grouped with Western Powers, despite being an Asian country. In all these facts, the element of peculiarity persists due to the historical circumstances that Japan passed through.

Modern-day Japan's foreign policy, however, has been deeply influenced and shocked by two events that occurred after the end of the Cold War, when the world order was shifting from a bipolar to a multipolar one: The Gulf War in 1991 and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. These two events represent a turning point for Japanese foreign policy, that can be explained through the Identity theory of the Constructivism paradigm.

As for Russia, the key element for the understating of its recent approach to foreign policy lies in the recent history of the county, having the collapse of the Soviet Union, defined by President Vladimir Putin as a “major geopolitical disaster of the century”³, a pure “tragedy”⁴, as its watershed. After having been a world superpower, the Russian Federation, acknowledged as the direct heir of Soviet legacy by international law, Russia passed the last years of the '90s recovering from the economic depression and the cultural shock of the downgrade on the international sphere. For this reason, as soon as the new multipolar world order was taking shape, and after the slow recovery was ongoing, Russia promptly raised as defender of multipolarism, in the hope of occupying a relevant position in its own sub-system and regaining the lost prestige on an international level. The early 2000s are marked by the broken hopes of Russia regarding a closer cooperation with the

³ Vladimir Putin, *Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation*, April 25, 2005, (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931> - last access on 28.05.2018).

⁴ See “*The Putin Interviews*” by Oliver Stone, 2017.

European Union and the West in general, earlier promoted by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrey Kozyrev (1990-1996). In fact, the disastrous experience of the military cooperation with NATO in Kosovo (1999) was assimilated as a learned lesson from Russia, which started being diffident with the West, which on the other side professed liberal-democratic values and the respect for international law, breaking it at the same time. Moreover, this influenced the Russian approach in conflicts along its own borders, as proved by the Ukrainian crisis of 2014⁵. The ultimate result was a further estrangement from Europe and the US, opening, on the other hand, a new window of opportunity to Eurasian integration and the Far East.

Another important element that must be stressed, is the cultural identification of Russia itself: Russia must not be perceived neither as a European power neither as an Asian one. It is, in its uniqueness, a Eurasian state, and this influences its foreign policy, its national interests' priorities and security perceptions. This element of duplicity can be found also in Japanese national identity and culture, representing a common point of the two countries. However, while Japan behavior traditionally was explained through the lenses of the Identity theory of the Constructivism school, Russia still acts on the international plan as a pure Realist actor according to the scholars of international relations. Therefore, this chapter will try to identify the common ground on which two such different states as Japan and Russia can interact with each other and provide also an alternative interpretation, inverting the paradigms of analysis.

1.1 Japanese foreign policy overview and guidelines

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, Japan's approach to world politics can be analyzed through the lenses of the Identity theory, "an approach that draws attention to the impact of national identity and culture on both foreign and domestic

⁵ See "Interview with Vladimir A. Orlov" in *"NATO-Russia relations in the peacekeeping operations: the Russian perspective"*, Jasmine Ceremigna, 2017, LUISSThesis.

policies. It rejects the idea that state interests are determined by the structure of the international system, and instead postulates that they are socially constructed and vary between states. For a constructivist, identities come before interests, and state identity emerges from interaction in different social environments, both domestic and international”⁶. For the Identity theory, the main driver of a country’s foreign policy is the relations that the individual has towards the other. Thus, it can be translated on the level of international relations considering the imagine that the self-consciousness state has of itself and how it is perceived by the other states or International Organizations through its Foreign Policy, i.e. the instrument it has to interact with the other actors of the international arena. And in Japan, the role of national self-identity has always been important through its history, since the very beginning, when Japan became an independent state which no longer accepted to be a Chinese vassal state. In modern policy terms, Japan tries to keep its uniqueness, acting as an Asian state with Western values. As a Minister of Foreign Affairs commented, “Japan, unlike the US, has the question of a dual identity. This is formed by a combination of a sense of affinity toward Asia on one hand, and a sense of membership of the western industrialized democracies on the other. It is an important task for Japanese foreign policy to make compatible the often dichotomizing requirements deriving from these two different identities”⁷.

Back to the Gulf war and the Us Iraq invasion, Japan drastically changed its foreign policy approach due to the blame addressed by the Western coalition to Japan, because of its scarce support and political inertia. While during Kuwait invasion, Japan failed to meet the expectatives of its allies providing only financial support instead of a military concrete action, damaging the perception that they had over it and bringing identity crisis both in the public opinion and for the decision

⁶ Amy L. Catalinac, “Identity Theory and Foreign Policy: Explaining Japan’s Responses to the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 U.S. War in Iraq”, *Politics & Policy*, Volume 35, No. 1 (2007): 58-100, Blackwell Publishing Inc.

⁷ Yoichiro Sato, “Japan Makes Hesitant Moves Toward Iraq”, *Asia Times*. September 27, 2003.

makers, the 2003 Iraqi invasion proved to be a perfect chance for Japan to reaffirm its alignment to Western neoliberal states and coalition.

Why Japan was reluctant to adopt a proactive strategy in the first case? The answer to this question lies in the nature of Japan's Constitution itself: according to Article 9,

“(1) Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.

(2) In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.”⁸

The after-war Japanese Constitution, drafted by the Americans, was assimilated into Japanese society and politics. In other words, Japan developed a sense of commitment to pacifism that prevented it to intervene directly in the conflict. Pacifism is part of Japanese modern identity. However, this was in contrast with the directives of the international community, which was witnessing a change of the world order. Nevertheless, the pacifist identity prevailed in the 1991 war, triggering the response of the International Community. Japan went through the process of rethinking Article 9, interpreting it in a more proactive way, in order to conceal the two sides of its own identity.

In fact, while Japan crystallized in its own self-conceived identity the idea of being an Asian country with Western feature, the debate about whether pacifism must be conserved or not is still ongoing, as the perception by other countries of a revival of Japanese militarism would trigger Japanese people and their own identity.

⁸ The Constitution of Japan, Tokyo, November 3, 1946
(http://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html - last access on 15.02.2018).

To prove its relevance, it is sufficient to look at the data of political abstention during elections⁹, while the Constitutional reform of Article 9 is the only political topic that ignites Japan with protests¹⁰.

The paragraph now will outline the main trends of Japanese foreign policy toward the International arena as a whole, in relation to the values and principles rooted in Japanese political culture, the same values that connect Japan to the Western countries, depicting itself as a lighthouse for democracy in Asia. A role that Japan is willingly to keep. This general overview will allow to extract the guidelines that lies beneath its national strategy, that point out also the direction of the specific policy addressed to its neighboring countries. Nevertheless, as the following paragraph will explain, Japanese foreign policy changes drastically when it comes to the Pacific agenda. Finally, the last paragraph of Japan's policy will focus on the special relation it has with Russia, how it influenced the construction of post-war Japanese identity and the subsequent policy adaptation, required as a consequence of the regional geopolitical order.

According to the 2017 Diplomatic Bluebook of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs¹¹, Japan's foreign policy and diplomacy move across four main vectors, that remark the country's position aligned to Western and democratic values. In particular, Japan undertakes the role of the "Proactive contribution to peace", highlights the importance of the three founding pillars of its policy (*a*-strengthening the Japan-U.S. Alliance, *b*- enhancing relations with neighboring

⁹ Reuters Staff, "Nearly half of Japan's voters support no party", April 05, 2010, *Reuters*, (<https://www.reuters.com/article/cnews-us-japan-politics-idCATRE63408220100405> - last access on 15.02.2018).

¹⁰ Hirotaka Kojo, "40,000 protest Abe's plans to revise Article 9 of Constitution", November 4, 2017, *The Asahi Shimbun* (<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201711040033.html> last access on 16.02.2018); Kiyoshi Takenaka, "Huge protest in Tokyo rails against PM Abe's security bills", August 30, 2015, *Reuters*, (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-politics-protest/huge-protest-in-tokyo-rails-against-pm-abes-security-bills-idUSKCN0QZ0C320150830> - last access on 16.02.2018).

¹¹ Diplomatic Bluebook 2017, official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2017/html/index.html> - last access on 16.02.2018).

countries, and c- strengthening economic diplomacy as a means of driving the growth of the Japanese economy), its awareness toward Global Issues as respect of human rights, environment, feminism, terrorism and the need to strengthening Strategic Communication and the Foreign Policy Implementation Structure.

Regarding the alliance with the US, Japan remarks that it shares with “the U.S. share fundamental values and strategic interests”¹², addressing to the US as an element of stability and prosperity in the region. This means that, despite the proposal of amending the Japanese Constitution, the rapprochement with Russia and the uncertainties aroused by Trump administration, the bilateral ties with the US are indissoluble. A remarkable event is the visit paid by President Barack Obama in May 2016 to the Peace Memorial of Hiroshima, followed by the visit of PM Shinzo Abe to Hawaii. “These reciprocal visits symbolized the strength of the Japan-U.S. Alliance, and served as an opportunity to demonstrate the power of tolerance and peace between countries which had previously been at war. At the summit meeting held in Hawaii in December, both leaders shared the view on the importance of advancing the Japan-U.S. Alliance to an even higher level, and shared recognition of the importance of expanding the network of alliances such as the Japan-U.S.-Australia and Japan-U.S.-India alliances to preserve stability and prosperity in the region, with a free and open Indo-Pacific”¹³. While Japan and US participate regularly to joint military drills under the new Guidelines for Japan-US Defense cooperation¹⁴, the US military presence in Okinawa represents an issue constantly raised by the local population.

The second pillar of Japanese Foreign Policy is the improvement of relations with neighboring countries. As old war reminiscences and nationalistic deeds

¹² International Situation and Japan's Diplomacy in 2016, Diplomatic Bluebook 2017, official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, (<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2017/html/chapter1/c0102.html> - last access on 17.02.2018).

¹³ *Supra*.

¹⁴ The Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation, April 27, 2015, official website of the Japanese Ministry of Defense (http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/anpo/shishin_20150427e.html - last access on 17.05.2018).

prevent Japan to establish a closer cooperation with South Korea and China, and the nuclear threat from North Korea tops the security agenda of the country, Japanese relations with the other Asian countries are good, thanks also to the influence of the soft power and the economic dependence that Japan exercises on the neighboring developing nations. Moreover, the role that Japan attributes to the ASEAN regional forum and the international organizations in general remarks its commitment to the liberal values of the international community: “the further integration, prosperity, and stability of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is vital for the peace and stability of the region. Japan will continue to support the centrality and unity of ASEAN, and strengthen its relationship with ASEAN and each of the ASEAN countries.

In addition, while utilizing regional frameworks such as the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Japan continues to strengthen its relationship with Europe in a multilayered approach. Japan also continues to promote security and defense cooperation with the UK, France, Germany and Italy. Furthermore, Japan continues to strengthen relationship with the Pacific island countries, Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean as well”¹⁵.

The third and last pillar of Japanese Foreign policy is focusing on the development of economic diplomacy, conceived by Japan as the main tool to exercise its influence overseas, being an economic peaceful power. Its objectives are: “(1) rulemaking to strengthen a free and open international economic system, (2) supporting Japanese companies’ overseas business expansion by promoting public-private cooperation, and (3) promoting resource diplomacy and attracting investment and tourists. For Japan, which has promoted economic growth on the basis of free trade, it is critically important to maintain and develop the open, stable

¹⁵ International Situation and Japan's Diplomacy in 2016, Diplomatic Bluebook 2017, official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, (<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2017/html/chapter1/c0102.html> - last access on 17.02.2018).

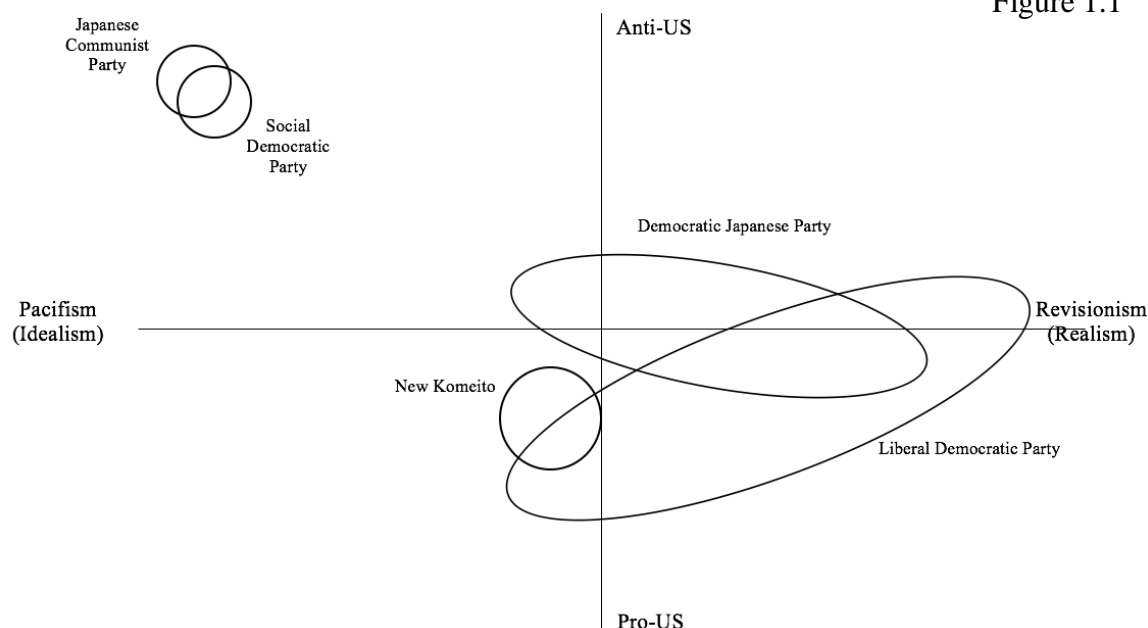
and rules-based international economic order. In the G7 Ise-Shima Summit and the G20 Hangzhou Summit, Japan appealed for the need to take all policy measures including monetary, fiscal and structural policies, and led the consensus-building efforts among the leaders of G7 and G20. Furthermore, as the pressure of protectionism continues to increase, Japan led the discussions on free-trade and inclusive growth through frameworks such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Regarding the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement signed in February 2016 as an initiative to promote free trade, in January 2017, ahead of other countries, Japan notified New Zealand, which is designated as the Depositary of the Agreement of the Diet approval in December 2016 and completion of Japan's domestic procedures. Japan will continue seeking agreement in principle on the Japan-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) as early as possible, and will vigorously pursue negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Japan-China-ROK Free Trade Agreement in parallel”.¹⁶

Usually, the Foreign Policy of a democratic country is prompted by the political and ideological vision that the domestic parties have, reacting to international changes and expressing the feelings of the population. However, the case of Japan is slightly different. The first consideration that must be done is that Japanese people is becoming more indifferent to politics, which at the same time is dominated by conservatism at the level of the political elite. The second noteworthy element regards the distribution of power and the security of Japan itself, which is provided mostly by the US. Because of historical circumstances, Japanese politics must always refer to Washington. For this reason, the domestic political debate sprawls along two vectors (see figure 1.1 on page 19, from 2001¹⁷).

¹⁶ *Supra*.

¹⁷ Wada Shuichi, “Article Nine of the Japanese Constitution and security policy: realism versus idealism in Japan since the Second World War”, *Japan Forum* 22:3-4, page 419, 2010.

Figure 1.1



Hence, the parties are defined by their approach to the military revival of Japan and the feelings toward the US. Indeed, being pacifist doesn't mean rely on the US for the national security, yet accepting the status quo and don't modify the role of the Self Defense Forces of Japan, and vice versa. In fact, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the ruling party of Japan, which governed constantly from 1955 to 2009 (except for the years 1993-94) and again from 2012 on, the LDP is known for its revisionist position regarding Article 9 of Japanese Constitution and its positive attitude toward the US. However, despite having been the ruling party for decades, the LDP didn't manage to change the Constitution, demonstrating the staidness and conservatism of the Japanese political system.

This chapter proved how Japan is included, through the objectives pursued by its Foreign Policy and its declarations, into the exclusive club of countries fully committed to liberal-democratic Western values, with a stratified political agenda that doesn't focus exclusively on primary national interest and state security. However, the sub-system in which Japan operates doesn't coincide with its domestic structure of politics.

1.1.1 Japanese strategy in the Pacific region

While on a global view Japan sees itself as a fulfilled democracy and a nation whose duties in relation to the international neoliberal order enshrined in its policies, when it comes to the relations with the other neighboring countries, Japan moves into a realist context and tries to conciliate the needed pragmatism with its idealism. Asserting that Japan does not care about state security and national interest would be naïve. In fact, the Asia-Pacific subsystem is the region where both the majority of world population lives and where the states increase each year their military expenditure the most. Moreover, in Asia, the proliferation of nuclear weapons involves five countries (Russia, China, India, Pakistan and North Korea – six if we consider the US as a direct actor of the Pacific region¹⁸). Apart from Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, in Asia all the other countries face scarce democracy index, that, according to the theory of democratic peace, poses an element of uncertainty and unpredictability to Japan. In addition, Japan is often addressed by other countries for its World War II crimes and abnegation of its past, which memory still influence Japanese policy towards them. For this reason, and the consequent fear of the revival of an expanding militarism, Japan moves cautious in the direction of a constitutional reform that would abrogate article 9 of its constitution.

Since 2012, Shinzo Abe, leader of the LDP, came back to the head of the executive power after a brief period in 2006-07. This represents a watershed in contemporary Japanese Foreign Policy. The second leadership of Abe, in fact, is characterized by an enhancement of the leadership and a more active presence of Japan in the international affairs, as stated by Abe himself during a speech he delivered in Washington to the CSIS, asserting that “Japan is back”¹⁹. The reelection of Shinzo Abe, after a left-wing government break, impacted also in the decision-making

¹⁸ The last three states, in particular, are undergoing a program of nuclearization.

¹⁹ Shinzo Abe, “Japan is back”, speech delivered at the Center of Strategic International Studies (CSIS), February 22, 2013 (https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/attachments/130222_speech_abe.pdf - last access on 20.02.18).

process, generating a sort of “hybrid leadership”²⁰. As the classic analyses did not take into account the role of the Prime Minister of Japan, theorizing that Japanese domestic and foreign policies are consensus-driven and influenced by the so-called “iron triangle”²¹, according to which the “interests carried by the business, bureaucratic, and political world constitute the engine behind the Japanese policy-making machine”²². However, recent developments in the geopolitical arena of the Pacific region, and the Japanese administrative reforms carried out by PM Ryutaro in 1997 provided the Cabinet of the executive with the tools that eventually centralized the top-down decision making process in the *Kantei*, the seat of the Government. The result is an “hybrid model of Japanese leadership”, which imposes an agent-centered understanding of Japanese leadership in relation to its foreign policy and diplomacy. In fact, as the leader of a nationalistic and conservative doctrine inside the LDP, Abe focused its policy agenda on the containment of China’s raising status and power, which can represent a treat to Japanese status as regional power.

The dichotomy of Sino-Japanese relations is the main driver of foreign policy decisions in the East Asia, involving a balance of power strategy that vaguely recalls the bipolar structure of the Cold War. This time, however, the play is on a regional level and involves China on one hand and Japan (backed by its main ally, the US) on the other, while all the other neighboring states try to benefit from the economic implications of Japanese containment strategy. As China tends to become and hegemonic power, it extends its influence through direct investments in Asian countries and Africa. By contrast, Japan tries to bound Chinese area of influence by investing, in its turn, in the infrastructure development of these countries²³. This is

²⁰ Giulio Pugliese, “Kantei diplomacy? Japan's hybrid leadership in foreign and security policy”, in *The Pacific Review*, 30:2, pages 152-68, 2017.

²¹ Chalmers A. Johnson, “MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925-1975”, Stanford University Press, 1982.

²² Giulio Pugliese, 2017, *ivi*.

²³ Siegfried Alegado, “Japan Still Beating China in Southeast Asia Infrastructure Race”, *Bloomberg*, February 8, 2018 (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-02-08/japan-still-beating-china-in-southeast-asia-infrastructure-race> - last access on 20.05.2018).

the Japanese strategy of economic balance in a nutshell. However, the situation in the Pacific is not only a matter of economic competition. As previously stated, Japanese diplomatic relations are highly influenced by nationalistic fears, unsolved issues, grudge and territorial disputes, that prevent the region to be divided in two distinct blocks (pro-US/Japan or pro-China).

For instance, Japan and South Korea hardly cooperate, despite being both US strongest allies in the Pacific²⁴ because of the Dokdo/Takeshima disputed islands²⁵ and the thorny issue of the Korean Comfort women, or women turned into sexual slaves by the Japanese occupying army and all the related consequences. Even though Japan apologized several times and instituted a compensation fund (the last attempt was the 2015 bilateral agreement, “but after the South Korean president, Moon Jae-in, was elected last fall [2017], he pledged to review the deal. In January [2018], Mr. Moon said he would leave the deal intact, but he called for a renewed and sincere apology from Japan, a declaration that provoked frustration in Tokyo. At a summit meeting with Mr. Moon immediately before the start of the [2018 Pyeongchang Winter] Olympics, Mr. Abe reiterated Japan’s position that the 2015 agreement should be ‘final and irreversible’”²⁶), Korean refused or criticized the sealed agreement, protesting in several ways, as inaugurating a statue to remind the Comfort women issue in front of the Japanese Consulate in Busan. However, the relations between South Korea and Japan are malleolus and issue-dependent: when

²⁴ With 15 military bases on the territory, the US military personnel in Korea amounts at over 23’000 men in active duty; In Japan, the active military personnel amounts at over 50’000 men (data from the official site of the US Forces in Japan - <http://www.usfj.mil> - last access on 21.02.2018).

²⁵ Japan’s Consistent Position on the Territorial Sovereignty over Takeshima, on the official site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (<http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/takeshima/index.html> - last access on 21.02.2018); The Korean Government’s Basic Position on Dokdo, on the official site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea (http://dokdo.mofa.go.kr/eng/dokdo/government_position.jsp - last access on 21.02.2018).

²⁶ Motoko Rich, Goals on the Ice and Politics in the Air as Japan Beats Unified Korean Team, *The New York Times*, February 14, 2018 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/14/sports/olympics/unified-korea-hockey-japan-politics.html> - last access on 23.02.2018).

South Korea has to face Japan directly, it uses harsh tones and stays on a steady position, sometimes adopting a more Chinese-oriented position²⁷. While the agenda is dominated by the North Korean threat, the Japan (as American military and political outpost in Asia) turns to be one of the most reliable ally.

On the other hand, the Republic of Korea (ROK) is a key element for Japanese strategy for two reason: the first is due the relevance of South Korea in terms of economics (being the 11th country by GDP²⁸) and soft power in the plan of encirclement and balancing of China. The second reason regards the North Korean Nuclear threat, as Seoul stands anyway as a privileged counterpart in the inter-Korean dialogue and its presence is indispensable for either the diplomatic approach in solving the crisis and as a provider of military information for Japan (as the 2016 Agreement between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Republic of Korea on the Protection of Classified Military Information proves it²⁹). For this reason, Japan reaffirms the importance of the enhancing the relations with neighboring country as one of the Three Pillars of Japanese diplomacy. As can be read in the Diplomatic Bluebook of Japan, “The ROK is Japan's most important neighbor which shares strategic interests with Japan. In 2016 there were frequent communications at the summit and foreign minister levels, and at all of the summit and foreign minister meetings, both sides shared the view that they would take responsibility to implement the agreement relating to the issue of comfort women made at the end of 2015. On the other hand, the installation of the comfort woman statue on the sidewalk in front of the Consulate-General of Japan in Busan in the end

²⁷ Park Byong-su, “South Korea’s ‘three no’s’ announcement key to restoring relations with China”, *Hankyoreh*, November 2, 2017

(http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/817213.html - last access on 24.02.2018).

²⁸ List of Countries by GDP, World Bank official website (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?year_high_desc=true - last access on 24.02.2018).

²⁹ Japan's Foreign Policy that Takes a Panoramic Perspective of the World Map, Diplomatic Bluebook 2017, official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2017/html/chapter2/c020101.html> - last access on 24.02.2018).

of 2016 is extremely regrettable, and Japan has conveyed its position to the ROK on various occasions, including the foreign ministers' meeting in February 2017. While continuing to tenaciously take every opportunity to request the ROK to steadily implement the agreement, it is important for Japan to deepen its cooperative relationship with the ROK in a wide range of areas, including security, and to move toward developing Japan-ROK relations into a new era of future-oriented era based on mutual trust. Furthermore, the Japan-China-ROK trilateral cooperative process is highly significant, and as the chair country, Japan hosted the Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Meeting in August³⁰.

Despite Japanese relations with China have recently improved, they faced a deterioration since 2010 due to the Senkaku Island dispute. The dispute of the Senkaku islands is an extraterritorial conflict between China, Japan and Taiwan which threatens the sovereignty of the aforementioned States over a little archipelago of 8 islands situated in the East China Sea, 120 nautical miles north-east from the shores of Taiwan, 200 nautical miles east from Mainland China and 200 nautical miles south-west from Okinawa (the Japanese prefecture which formally administrates the islands at the moment).

As a matter of fact, the conflict did not start recently, as the Japanese Empire annexed the former Ryukyu Kingdom as Okinawa prefecture in 1879. As consequence, the Senkaku islands, which lay between the Ryukyu Kingdom and the Qing Empire, became the Sino-Japanese boundary for the first time.

Nevertheless, the first protests rose only in 1970, when, after that a geological research of the Committee for Coordination of Joint Perspective for Mineral Resources in Asian Offshore Areas (CCOP) commissioned by the United Nation Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (UNECAFE) detected the possible presence of a rich oil reserve, estimated at 100 to 160 billion barrels, the Taiwanese

³⁰ International Situation and Japan's Diplomacy in 2016, Diplomatic Bluebook 2017, official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, (<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2017/html/chapter1/c0102.html> - last access on 17.02.2018).

parliament approved a bill which gave the authorization to Taiwanese oil companies to exploit the resources in the continental platform of Senkaku Islands. In meantime, China as well signed agreements with different companies in order to drill the sea bottom in the area that included the islands. Tokyo sent promptly a warning to Taiwan, claiming that it had no right to exploit the soil. Protest and manifestation against Japan took place in Taiwan and in the Senkakus. In meantime, also China started claiming the islands as part of its territory. Since then, several agreements between the actors of the conflicts tried to resolve the dispute, yet protests that took place in each country and the incidents that occurred sank the attempts of reaching a solution.

However, the conflict exacerbated only after September 2010, when a Chinese fishing boat was halted and its crew arrested by Japanese navy for territorial border violations. China adopted a new approach to the issue. Before 2010, it was not one of the main actors of the conflict³¹.

The Chinese Democratic Republic maintained a low profile in the dispute until 2010 for four main reasons. The first one is deterrence: China has lacked for many decades the military means to execute a limited aims operation to seize and then defend the islands from any counterattack to retake them. Furthermore, Japan possess the most professional and capable navy in the East Asia. Another element of deterrence is the alliance between Japan and United States, which commit the US to defend Japan in case of military aggression. The second reason is the existence of Japanese continuous administration of the islands. Continuous administration or occupation by one state in a territorial dispute increases significantly the cost for the other side of using force, as the international community would view any use of force as a clear sign of revisionist behavior. Occupation by one side, in other words, reinforces the status quo bias of the international system. A third reason for the absence of escalation stems from the continuing competition between China and Japan for diplomatic influence within East Asia. In fact, both countries likely want

³¹ Steven Wei Su, "The Territorial Dispute over the Tiaoyu/Senkaku Islands: An Update", in *Ocean Development & International Law*, 36:1, 45-61.

to maintain reputations as constructive and benign powers in the region. Escalation or use of force over the Senkakus would worsen that reputation for China. In particular, China's diplomatic strategy through the mid-2000s revolved around the concept of peaceful development and reassuring other states about the consequences of China's rise. During this period, belligerence over disputed territories would signal to the region that a more powerful China might also be more aggressive, thus increasing suspicion and uncertainty about China's long-term intentions.

However, the aforementioned boat incident in 2010 was seen by China as an attempt of Japan to impose its coercive power in order to alter the status quo. China's response was harsh: more naval patrols were sent in the area, some Japanese nationalists were arrested by Chinese authorities, manifestations took place in several parts of China. The tension peaked in 2012 when the Japanese Government declared that it would have purchased the islands from a private owner, whose family had the concession to exploit the islands since 1896 until 1932, when the islands were formally bought. Initially, the purchasing proposal was advanced by Shintaro Ishihara, Governor of Tokyo. However, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda considered Ishihara's position and statements too nationalistic and decided that the purchase should have been made by the Government itself.

The decision came at a critical moment for China's domestic policy: the preparations for the 18th Party Congress that would select a new generation of top leaders were approaching. The period was delicate due to ongoing negotiations and disagreements over the composition of the Politburo, the party's top decision-making body, which intensified during the summer of 2012. Of course, the debate within the party was not publicized, but nevertheless it indicated a period of insecurity for top leaders and gave China even more reason to respond vigorously to the nationalization when it occurred. From Beijing's perspective, Japan's purchase of the three islands appeared to be designed to exploit the uncertainty within the highest levels of the leadership. That's why, in order to reaffirm itself as regional power and deflect the focus from its internal issues, China intensified its military presence in the East China Sea. Apparently, now the situation seems to have reached

a stable point, as proved by the reduced presence of Chinese patrols within the Senkaku Islands territorial waters since December 2013.

Indeed, the events exacerbated not only the diplomatic relation between the two countries, but had also serious economic consequences, highlighting the high level of interdependence between them.

Fueled by nationalisms on both sides, in 2012 a wave of anti-Japanese protests crossed China, provoking damages and economic losses. According to the Financial Times, “many protesters in Beijing called for a boycott of Japanese goods, with some handing out lists of 40 brands people were encouraged to shun, including food and drinks companies such as Suntory, Toyota cars and Sony electronics. Japanese businesses have responded by shuttering stores and halting factory operations throughout China to avoid being targeted. Fast Retailing, owner of the Uniqlo brand, shut outlets in Beijing, while dozens of 7-Eleven convenience stores, which belong to another Japanese company, were also closed. Canon, the consumer electronics group, has halted operations at three factories until Wednesday. Sony said two of its seven factories would be closed on Tuesday. Mitsumi Electric, an important supplier to Nintendo, said it was suspending manufacturing operations. Toyota, Honda and Nissan said it had suspended production at some locations in China³²”. As China represents the second export and import partner for Japan³³, while the latter is the second partner for both import and export (excluding Hong Kong) for China, and because of the assortment that the US President Barack Obama expressed during the state visit on 23-25 April 2014 in Japan, declaring that the Senkaku Island are included in the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan³⁴, after the escalation in 2012 the dispute was freeze. The relations

³² FT Reporters, “Anti-Japan protests spread across China”, *The Financial Times*, September 18, 2012, (<https://www.ft.com/content/85f4f7a2-0138-11e2-99d3-00144feabdc0> - last access 01.03.2018).

³³ Japanese trade data, the Observatory of Economic Complexity (<https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/jpn/> - last access on 01.03.2018).

³⁴ U.S.-Japan Joint Statement. The United States and Japan: Shaping the Future of the Asia-Pacific and Beyond, official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, (http://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page24e_000045.html last access on 02.03.2018); Joint Press

between the two countries slightly improved, as proved by the State visits that followed, the most recent dated on January 2018 by the Japanese Foreign Minister Kono³⁵.

Nevertheless, China is still perceived by Japan as a threat to regional stability and its direct opponent, as reported by the Annual White Paper of Defense, especially as China “particularly over maritime issues where its interests conflict with others’, continues to act in an assertive manner, including attempts at changing the status quo by coercion based on its own assertions incompatible with the existing international order”³⁶. Moreover, China is repeatedly criticized by its lack of military transparency, incompatible with its status on a Global level, as “China’s influence in the international community has risen politically, economically, and militarily, other countries are closely following China’s moves. In order to allay their concerns over China, it is becoming more important for China itself to explain its military activities according to the facts and improve the transparency of its national defense policy and military capabilities”³⁷. For these reasons, Japan is aware of the importance of its role in containing Chinese military and economic expansion. Thus, Shinzo Abe stressed during its executive the importance of the Constitutional amendment of article 9, while increasing the armory, providing the Self Defence Forces the most advanced military vehicles as sixty-seven F35A stealth multirole fighters³⁸. However, as Japan cannot operate on a direct military manner, it shifted the

Conference with President Obama and Prime Minister Abe of Japan, Tokyo, April 24, 2014, (<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/04/24/joint-press-conference-president-obama-and-prime-minister-abe-japan> - last access on 02.03.2018).

³⁵ Foreign Minister Kono Visits China, (January 27-28, 2018), official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (http://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page3e_000814.html - last access on 03.03.2018).

³⁶ Analysis of China, The Japan White Paper of Defense, official website of the Ministry of Defense of Japan (http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/pdf/2017/DOJ2017_1-2-3_web.pdf - last access on 04.03.2018).

³⁷ *Supra*.

³⁸ Elena Dal Maso, “Leonardo, Tokyo vuole almeno altri venti F35A (Tokyo wants to buy at least more twenty F35A from Leonardo S.p.A.)”, *Milano Finanza* (<https://www.milanofinanza.it/news/leonardo-tokyo-vuole-almeno-altri-venti-f35a-201802211258384804> - last access on 04.03.2018).

competition on the economic plan, in an ambitious chase, trying to nullify the Chinese moves aimed to expand its influence, as the One Belt One Road development project.

In this perspective, Japan regards India as another valuable regional ally. India and Japan historically have always had good diplomatic relation, also because of the common Buddhist cultural heritage, that encourages mutual dialogue and respect, as Buddhism was introduced officially in 552 BC through South Korea, according to the *Nihon Shoki*³⁹. Since then, the cultural exchange between the two countries increased across the centuries, and the relations were not even undermined by the World War II, during which Japan and India were belligerents. Indeed, since Japan founded in 1958 the Official Development Assistance (ODA), India became the first recipient country of the Yen loan assistance plan aimed at the development of infrastructure, agriculture and healthcare⁴⁰. While the cooperation is spread on different areas and topics of interests, from military cooperation⁴¹ to nuclear civil development⁴², is likely that in the near future India will be included into Japan's strategy of economic encirclement and constriction, and India would easily join Japanese plan, especially since China's behavior is causing concerns to India too, as, for instance, in 2017 a Chinese military expedition with the aim of constructing a road inside Doklam, a disputed territory with Indian ally Bhutan, provoked the reaction of Indian army which stopped the Chinese troops.

³⁹ Richard John Bowring, "The religious traditions of Japan, 500–1600", Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. pp. 16–17, 2005.

⁴⁰ Japan-India Relations - Outline of Japan's ODA to India, on the website of the Embassy of Japan in India (http://www.in.emb-japan.go.jp/Japan-India-Relations/Japan_ODA_India2.html - last access on 05.03.2018).

⁴¹ Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation between Japan and India, official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/india/pmv0810/joint_d.html - last access on 05.03.2018); Ankit Panda, "India-Japan Defense Ministers Agree To Expand Strategic Cooperation", *The Diplomat*, January 08, 2014 (<https://thediplomat.com/2014/01/india-japan-defense-ministers-agree-to-expand-strategic-cooperation/> - last access on 05.03.2018).

⁴² "India, Japan sign landmark civil nuclear deal", *The Times of India*, November 11, 2016 (<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-Japan-sign-landmark-civil-nuclear-deal/articleshow/55371858.cms> - last access on 05.03.2018).

The greatest countermove presented by Japan and India to contrast China and its One Belt One Road development project is the Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), emerged in the joint declaration issued by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in November 2016. “India has a long history of development cooperation in Africa in capacity building and contributing towards development of social sector through several unique programs like Pan Africa e-Network Indian companies have sustainable presence in the African region. The EXIM Bank is the lead organization for carrying out the development credit tasks. India has unique distinction in providing affordable, appropriate and adaptable technology. It is also working in project execution and in building technical capacities in many developing countries in the region. India also organizes India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) to develop a structured engagement between India and Africa. IAFS is a vital platform to engage with Africa at regional, sub-regional and bilateral levels, and understand their concerns in a better manner. It has contributed to improve the quality of partnership between India and Africa. Being a developing country itself, India’s development partnerships in Africa are, however, confronting the challenges of resource constraints. Japan, in this context, can play a major complementary role to overcome these challenges. It has strong development assistance programs in many developing countries, including Africa. Japan has expertise in designing, planning and delivering hardware infrastructure. It enjoys a leading edge in research and development areas. It also has the capacity to transfer capabilities for managing and strengthening supply chains in manufacturing sector and infrastructure projects. Japan holds Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD), which provides an open forum to generate innovative discussion among stakeholders participating in the African development programs. Since its inception in 1993, TICAD has contributed in improving social and economic conditions in Africa mainly through aid grants and technical assistance. Africa has tremendous scope for growth and requires development partners to achieve it. While its participation in regional and global value chains is important for its growth, the development priorities among countries, regions and sub-regions

vary substantially. The development cooperation and infrastructure and connectivity development program under AAGC would have to be aligned with these needs at national, regional and sub regional level. India and Japan bring a shared repertoire of development cooperation strengths for Africa. The strengths of India and Japan development programs need to be tuned with development needs of Africa, and also its development priorities. The Special Strategic and Global Partnership between India and Japan adds further value to this vision”⁴³. Considering the amount of investments that China poured into African countries, the Indo-Japanese initiative could also steal a relevant market share from the Chinese government.

1.1.2 Russo-Japanese relations: Tokyo’s perspective

With almost of 13,1 million km² (about 77%) of its territory located East of Ural Mountains, Russia is without any doubt considered as a transcontinental State, which as national interests and a relevant role in the Asia-Pacific region. Due to historical unsolved matters, the possibility of cooperation and development, and the relevance Russia regained in global affairs during the last years, Japan looks at it with a certain interests and attention. Indeed, the present-days status of the relations between the two regional powers has been affected by the unresolved territorial dispute over the Northern Territories/Kuril Islands, which prevented them to sign a proper peace treaty from WWII and it will be analyzed in detail in the second chapter. Nevertheless, the issue didn’t prevent Russia and Japan to establish bilateral political and economic ties. On the contrary, the absence of a peace treaty has been the leitmotiv of their relations, especially after the fall of the Soviet Union and it allowed the deepening of diplomatic bonds aimed to resolve the dispute and going even beyond it.

⁴³ “Asia Africa growth corridor - Partnership for Sustainable and Innovative Development: A Vision Document”, by the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) (<http://www.eria.org/Asia-Africa-Growth-Corridor-Document.pdf> - last access on 07.03.2018).

Historically, according to the Constructivism approach of the Identity Theory introduced earlier at the beginning of this chapter, Russia contributed at different degrees directly –and indirectly– shaping Japan self-perception and its approach to world politics as policy itself is perceived “as a representational practice that secures and reproduces the identity”⁴⁴. Japan’s pacifism, opposed its past militarism and expansionism, represent a solid pillar of its constitution. However, unlike the other defeated totalitarian regimes defeated by the Allies –Italy and Germany–, Japanese political tradition remained anchored to the right-wing parties. Of course, this was possible because of the military presence of the US, which didn’t attempt to dismantle the Japanese political culture, yet it enhanced the right-wing elements with liberal and capitalistic values, in opposition to the leftist communist dictatorship established in the Soviet Union, turning Japan into the biggest social experiment on a nation scale⁴⁵. According to the Identity theory, a country (or society) identifies itself in relation to another group which it reveres, in this case, the US and the Western World. Still, another group can be taken as a negative model (the “other”) from which differentiate and sublimate its own virtues (the “self”). As in the case of Russia. Russia has always been the favorite “other” to compare with to bolster the self-perception as a valuable, civilized and superior nation, at the same level of the European one, after the end of the period of isolation known as *Sakoku*. At the time of the rise of the Empire of the Rising Sun, in fact, Japan engaged a war with the Russian Empire in 1904-1905 for the control of Manchuria and Korea, during which “in the domestic discourse Japan came to represent the civilized world, as a nation that embarked on the historical mission of fighting the barbarian Russia, fighting in the name of civilization, peace and humanity”⁴⁶. The Japanese victory was a shock

⁴⁴ Alexander Bukh, “Identity, Foreign Policy and the ‘Other’: Japan’s ‘Russia’”, *European Journal of International Relations*, SAGE Publications and ECPR-European Consortium for Political Research, Vol. 15(2): 319–345, 2009.

⁴⁵ Douglas MacArthur, “Reminiscences”, McGraw-Hill, New York, pages 280-83, 1964.

⁴⁶ Nakoko Shimazu, “Love Thy Enemy: Japanese Perceptions of Russia”, in J.W. Steinberg (ed.) *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero*, pp. 365–84. Leiden: Brill, 2005.

not only for Russia, but for the all West, since for the first time an Asian nation defeated a “white” nation at war, destroying the set of Eurocentric beliefs rooted into Western society, inciting the new-born Japanese imperialism and racism over the other Asian states.

The history of Japanese-Russian relations has always been characterized by a long-lasting tradition of Russian xenophobia, the product of Russia’s peculiar geopolitical position, that eventually perpetuated during Soviet times and was presented as a source of mistrust and reliance on self-help⁴⁷. Moreover, Russia has always been depicted in Japanese mentality as an autocratic and nepotistic state, soaked with jingoism, instability and conflict, where the basis of the state power is purely military, opposed to the self-perception of a peaceful and civilized Japanese merchant state, whose power is based on economics and trade. Nevertheless, the socio-cultural narrative of Russia in the post-war decades was actually the reaction of the negative conception of Japanese culture, projecting into Russia the negative traits attributed to Japan by both the domestic narrative and the Western one. As the anthropologist Ruth Benedict argued in her study “The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: patterns of Japanese Culture”, written at the invitation of the U.S. Office of War Information in order to understand and predict the behavior of the Japanese in World War II by reference to a series of contradictions in traditional culture, Japanese culture embodies both the negative characteristics of the sword and the positive ones of the Chrysanthemum. As the latter represents the aesthetics, politeness, adaptability and hospitality, the first represents the negative aspects of Japanese tradition, as militarism, rigidity and conservatism, contributing to create a “shame society”, a society in which the primary device for gaining control over people and maintaining social order is the inculcation of shame and the complementary threat of ostracism, usually opposed to the Western “guilt society”,

⁴⁷ Hiroshi Kimura, “Distant Neighbors: Japanese–Russian Relations under Brezhnev and Andropov”, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe 2000; Ryotaro Shiba, “Roshia ni tsuite-hoppo no genkei (About Russia: The Original Form of the North)”, *Bungei shunju*, Tokyo, 2002.

in which the primary method of social control is the inculcation of feelings of guilt for behaviors that the individual believes to be undesirable.

“This psychological imbalance is seen as a main cause of a consistent insecurity regarding the self and the outside, which in turn leads to drastic changes in behavior from passive submission to extreme violence. Another key aspect of the negative conception of Japan’s culture is an unquestioning respect for power. Along with the hierarchical structure of Japanese society and the hierarchical construction of the world with Japan at the top, it was identified as a key characteristic of Japanese culture not only by Benedict (1946) but also by one of the most celebrated of Japan’s postwar critical intellectuals, Maruyama Masao”⁴⁸, who wrote:

“Consequently, when the premises of the national hierarchy were transferred horizontally into the international sphere, international problems were reduced to a single alternative: conquer or be conquered. In the absence of any higher normative standards with which to gauge international relations, power politics is bound to be the rule and yesterday’s timid defensiveness will become today’s unrestrained expansionism. Naturally, a psychological complex of fear and arrogance holds sway here as a primitive attitude towards the unknown”⁴⁹.

Alike as Japan, Russia is perceived by Japanese themselves as affected by a split personality, which parts are embodied by the “plains character” (representing the negative characteristics of extremism, hedonism and the eager for freedom from any superior authority), juxtaposed to the “forest character” (which represents silence, abstinence and mysticism).⁵⁰ In the socio-cultural perception and construction of Russia, these characteristics were projected into Russian nation and the subsequent foreign policy of the Kremlin. As remarked before, during Soviet times the attitude toward Russia did not improve, for a series of reason. Firstly, on a

⁴⁸ Alexander Bukh, 2009, *ivi*.

⁴⁹ Masao Maruyama, “Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics”, Oxford University Press, London, 1963.

⁵⁰ Hayao Shimizu, “Nihonjin wa naze roshia ga kirai ka (Why do the Japanese Hate Russia?)”, Yamate shobo shinsha, Tokyo, 1992; Yoshio Morimoto, “Sobieto to roshio (USSR and Russia)”, Kodanasha, Tokyo, 1989.

pretty political plan, the bipolar division saw Japan and Russia siding on opposite fronts, exacerbating the diplomatic relations also because of the invasion of the Red Army of the Japanese Northern Territories. Secondly, on an abstract plan, in order to expiate the guilty of a right-wing militarism and expansionism under the aegis of the US (although there was also a bottom-up will from Japanese leaders and people to atone themselves), without allowing a leftist government to take power, Japan identified the Soviet regime as a despotic state even worse than its imperial past, taking the chance to empathize the break with its pre-war politics. With the same purpose, unlike in Germany, Washington granted amnesty to Emperor Hirohito and several war criminals. The result was the weakening of the left opposition in Japan that persists until today and the creation of a liberal, democratic and capitalist stronghold in Asia, at the time when the Cold War was solidifying the dichotomy of the new world order.

Nevertheless, the attempt to normalize the bilateral relations during Brezhnev's leadership in the early '70s and initiated by the URRS itself did not involve the reconfiguration of Russian "otherness", and the diffidence, already accentuated by the Soviet repression of democratic practices in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968), was enforced later by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, reconfirming "the political otherness of the USSR and reproduced the increasingly dominant self-conception of Japan as democratic, peaceful and part of the Western bloc in the Cold War rivalry"⁵¹.

Only during the years of Gorbachev reform, named *Perestroika* (reconstruction) and *Glasnost* (transparency), the perception of Japan toward Russian was changing, as proved by Gorbachev visit to Tokyo in April 1991. Indeed, it was considered to be the unformal recognition of Japan as a political and economic power, admitting and confirming its superiority as a capitalist democracy. When, six months after the visit of Gorbachev, the Soviet Union collapsed, Japan saw it as the latest proof of its status as mature representative of the values of democracy, rule of law, freedom and the efficiency of market economy principles, reaffirming its

⁵¹ Alexander Bukh, 2009, *ivi*.

political identity. Thus, “the process of the reconstruction of the Japanese political ‘self’ continued vis-a-vis the newly independent Russia”⁵², with the result of the slight improvement of bilateral ties.

It must be said, that Japan and Russia both share the self-acknowledgment of their peculiar status: neither of them are completely part of Europe, but both pursue its values in their own way, divided between Asia and the West. On 24 September 1991, during the UN General Assembly, “Foreign Minister Nakayama declared, in his foreign policy speech, five new principles to govern Japanese policy towards the Soviet Union/Russian Federation:

- 1) To express support and solidarity to Soviet internal and external reforms and to increase effective assistance;
- 2) To strengthen relations with the Russian Federation;
- 3) To expand cooperation, so that the Soviet Union would become a constructive partner in the Asia-Pacific region;
- 4) To support cooperation between the Soviet Union and IMF, the World Bank, and other international economic organizations;
- 5) To drastically improve bilateral relations by way of concluding the peace treaty based on the principle of law and justice, as a most important issue”⁵³

When, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became clear that Russia was shifting to a market economy and establishing a newborn democracy, proving the genuineness of its intentions reducing the troops in the far East and engaging a dialogue with Tokyo, Japan reinforced its self-perception as a mature capitalist democracy and world trading power, this time finding a new vocation in foreign

⁵² *Supra.*

⁵³ Kazuhiko Togo, “Japan’s Foreign Policy 1945-2003: the quest for a proactive policy”, Brill Leiden, Boston, 2005.

policy, incentivizing Russia and other developing states to reach an acceptable level of stability and prosperity. Prime Minister Hashimoto, in the speech he delivered to the Japan Association of Corporate Executives (JACE), remarked “his admiration of the ‘historical mission’ of transition to a market economy and democracy that Russia had embarked on and argued that from now on, Japan’s relations with Russia should be based on three principles: trust, mutual benefit (as opposed to the winner/loser approach) and a long-term perspective to create a sound base for the future”⁵⁴, opening the door for a deeper cooperation and socialization. The support by Japan for the admittance of Russia to the G7 and to the APEC during the Vancouver Summit in 1997 are other examples of Japan’s change toward Russia⁵⁵, which culminated with the signature of the Memorandum in Moscow in 1991 between the Russian and Japanese Ministries of Defense. Even though great steps forwards were made thanks to the personal relationship of PM Hashimoto and President Yeltsin, as the so-called “Hashimoto-Yeltsin Plan”, discussed during the informal meeting of the two leaders on 1 and 2 November 1997 in Krasnoyarsk, which was aimed to “boost economic relations in the seven following areas, which the Russian side greatly appreciated: 1) investment cooperation initiative, 2) Russia’s incorporation in the global economy, 3) enlargement of reform assistance, 4) management training program, 5) strengthening of the energy dialogue, 6) peaceful utilization of nuclear power, 7) and space cooperation”⁵⁶, when PM Hashimoto resigned in 1998, the perception toward Russia didn’t change again, as proved by the visit to Moscow of PM Obuchi. Nevertheless, the Russian domestic political stagnation, marked by the Constitutional crisis of 1993, halted further developments until the election of Vladimir Putin in 2000. By then, the international arena was shifting from a bipolar to a multipolar order, with the subsequent changes of Japanese Defense policy, which was concretized in 2004 when for the first time since WWII Japanese Self-Defense Forces were deployed outside Japan, addressing new treats to peace as

⁵⁴ Kazuhiko Togo, 2005, *ivi*.

⁵⁵ Ryutaro Hashimoto, “Roshia to wa kanzen na paatonaashippu o (Towards a complete partnership with Russia)”, *Gaiko Forum* 13(13): 30–5, 2000.

⁵⁶ Kazuhiko Togo, 2005, *ivi*.

terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the presence of ballistic missiles in the region. Moreover, in 2010, the new Military Guidelines of Japan, shifting the focus from a “threat from the North” (namely, Russia/USSR) to the need to counter the rising of China, declared the end of an era in the geopolitics of the Pacific subsystem and a new chapter for the relations with Russia. As can be read in the Bluebook of Diplomacy of Japan, “in recent years, Russia places importance on the development of the Russian Far East and the East Siberia and has been proactively enhancing relations with the states in the Asia-Pacific region that is a center of the growth of global economy. The development of the relations with Russia as a partner in the Asia-Pacific region contributes not only to Japan's national interests but also to peace and prosperity of the region. Japan and Russia have developed cooperative relations in various fields including security, economy and human exchange”⁵⁷. Despite this, Japan is looking with extreme care the military reform undergoing in Russia since 1997 and the nuclear arsenal possessed by Moscow, even though it does not represent a direct threat to Japan⁵⁸.

The contemporary status of Japanese-Russian bilateral ties will be analyzed in the next chapter as the political framework in which the Kuril Island territorial claim is taking place.

1.2 Russian foreign policy overview and guidelines

As already stated in the introduction of this chapter, Russia’s behavior in the international arena can be interpreted as the one of a Realist actor. However, the realist (and neorealist) paradigm has been criticized over time by other schools of thought as liberalism. For this reason, it would be more appropriate trying to

⁵⁷ Japan's Foreign Policy that Takes a Panoramic Perspective of the World Map, Diplomatic Bluebook 2017, official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2017/html/chapter2/c020101.html> - last access on 24.02.2018).

⁵⁸ Analysis on Russia, The Japan White Paper of Defense, official website of the Ministry of Defense of Japan (http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/pdf/2017/DOJ2017_1-2-4_web.pdf - last access on 13.03.2018).

operationalize and interpret the vectors of Russian Foreign Policy through the lenses of Neoclassical Realism, theorized by Gideon Rose in 1998. Indeed, some elements of Realism persist, as for instance the unity of the state that acts on the international system, which is still perceived as anarchic, despite not in Hobbesian terms. For the Russian Federation, the unity of the state in foreign policy is represented excellently by its President, Vladimir Putin and his closer collaborators, who concentrates in his hands the decision process, defining his foreign policy strategy according to his agenda of national interests. However, Neoclassical realism doesn't focus on security as the only priority and driver of the countries' external behavior. "Neoclassical realists assume that states respond to the uncertainties of international anarchy by seeking to control and shape their external environment. Regardless of the myriad ways that states may define their interests [...] they are likely to want more rather than less external influence, and pursue such influence to the extent that they are able to do so"⁵⁹. The external influence exercised is based on a calculus of the material power capabilities, i.e. the actual availableness of natural resources and military apparatus, which establish the parameters of a country's foreign policy. However, the exact esteem of such a force cannot be precise or there are difficulties in the exploit of these resources, and this aspect is important for the theorization of a foreign policy as much as the fact that policy decisions are taken by actual persons, who base the political action on their perception of the forces at stake. For this reason, Neorealist theory analyzes power on the basis of "the strength and structure of states relative to their societies, because these affect the proportion of natural resources that can be allocated in foreign policy"⁶⁰. Moreover, the systemic structure is believed to influence indirectly the foreign policy of a country, limiting the political agenda of the leaders rather than forcing a selection. "For all these reasons

⁵⁹ Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy", *World Politics*, Vol. 51, No.1 (Oct., 1998), p. 152.

⁶⁰ Gideon Rose, 1998, *Ibidem*.

[...] understanding the links between power and policy requires close examination of the context within which foreign policies are formulated and implemented”⁶¹.

Speaking about perception, there is an historical fundamental bias in the conceptualization of Russian Foreign Policy: its geographical vulnerability. Being the largest country on Earth has its disadvantages, as Russia always had much more borders to control and where an invasion can come from. Especially relevant is the fact that Moscow is located deep into the Eastern European plain, with no natural defenses: this increased the sense of vulnerability of Russian leaders for centuries, at the point that Russian Foreign Policy has been characterized in the past by territorial expansion and establishment of buffer states between its borders and other powerful Countries. The same reason pushed the Tsars in conquering the remote areas of Northern Asia, until the Pacific Ocean, although with substantial differences in comparison to the colonies established by European powers: the local elites, in fact, supported or didn't opposed, at least, Russian expansion. Consequently, the elites of the periphery of the Russian Empires was not discriminated but integrated into the central one and the territory, englobed into Russian national borders, was not exploited merciless as in the classical colonization model. On the contrary, the new territories received subsidies from the central state⁶². Nowadays, Russia's natural defenses are represented by the Arctic Ocean in the North, the Bering and Okhotsk Seas in the Far East, the Altay Mountains that separate Russia from China in the South of Siberia while the Caucasus repairs Russia from the Turkish area of influence. Where there are no mountains or seas to provide protection to Russian borders, Moscow has extended its influence over the lesser states of the Post-Soviet Space (or CIS) as Kazakhstan in Central Asia (through the Eurasian Union) or Ukraine and Belorussia (involved in the Custom Union with Russia) in Eastern Europe. However, this remains the most critical and sensitive area for Russia: “on

⁶¹ Gideon Rose, 1998, *ivi*.

⁶² Dmitry Streltsov (under the redaction of), “Introduction”, in “Россия и страны востока в постбиполярный период (Russia and the countries of the Orient in the post-bipolar era)”, Aspekt Press, Moscow, 2014.

the northern European plain, no matter where Russia's borders are drawn, it is open to attack [...]; The only physical advantage Russia can have is depth. The farther west into Europe its borders extend, the farther conquerors have to travel to reach Moscow. Therefore, Russia is always pressing westward on the northern European Plain and Europe is always pressing eastward. That is not the case with other borders of Russia”⁶³. Moreover, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expanded itself with the membership of Eastern European Countries as Poland and Hungary in 1999 and the Baltic Countries, Bulgaria and Romania in 2004. It would be logical to think for the Russian leadership that NATO is posing a threat to Russia itself, especially considering the failed attempts of cooperation, the disastrous outcome of the operations in Kosovo the ambiguous dialogues regarding the possibility for Russia to join NATO⁶⁴ or the unilateral decision of the United States to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) in 2002. “We had a practical chance to mend Europe's divide and implement the dream of a common European home, which many European thinkers and politicians, including President Charles de Gaulle of France, wholeheartedly embraced. Russia was fully open to this option and advanced many proposals and initiatives in this connection. Logically, we should have created a new foundation for European security by strengthening the military and political components of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Vladimir Putin said in a recent interview with the German newspaper Bild adding that German politician Egon Bahr proposed similar approaches. Unfortunately, our Western partners chose differently. They opted to expand NATO eastward and to advance the geopolitical space they controlled closer to the Russian border. This is the essence of the systemic problems that have soured Russia's relations with the United States and the European Union. It is notable that George Kennan, the architect of the US policy of containment of the Soviet Union, said in his winter years that the ratification of

⁶³ Friedman George, “The next 100 years. A forecast for the 21th century”, Anchor Books, New York, (page 103), 2010.

⁶⁴ See “*The Putin Interviews*” by Oliver Stone, 2017.

NATO expansion was ‘a tragic mistake’⁶⁵. From this point of view, the aggressive behavior of Russia can be interpreted as an actual defensive attempt to respond to the hawkish policy of the US and the West in general. After all, “the traditional path to invade Russia is a three-hundred-miles gap between the northern Carpathians and the Baltic Sea. This is a flat, easily traversed country with few river barriers. This European plain is a smooth rider for invaders. A European invader can move due east to Moscow or to St. Petersburg in the northwest. During the Cold War the distance from St. Petersburg to NATO’s front line was more than a thousand miles. Today the distance is about seventy miles. This explains the strategic nightmare Russia faces in the Baltics – and what it will need to do to fix the problem. [...] For a country that was invaded three times in the last two hundred years, the comfortable assumption that NATO and its members are no threat is not something it can risk. [...] From a Russian point of view, the major invasion route into their country is not only wide open but also in the hands of countries with a pronounced hostility to Russia. [...] The Russians can live with a neutral Baltic region. Living with a Baltic region that is part of NATO and close to the Americans, however, is a much more difficult risk to take. On the other hands the Americans, having backed down in Central Asia, and being cautious in the Caucasus, can’t retreat from the Baltics. Any compromise over the three NATO members would send Eastern Europe into a panic. Eastern Europe’s behavior would become unpredictable, and the possibility of Russian influence spreading westward would increase”⁶⁶.

While the relations of Russia with the West are consumed by a series of incidents and actions undertaken by both parts since the Ukrainian crisis, which provoked the hard reaction of Russia as it was perceiving an advancement of the EU sphere of influence over a country within Russian natural orbit⁶⁷, Russia now is

⁶⁵ Sergey Lavrov’s article "Russia’s Foreign Policy: Historical Background" for "*Russia in Global Affairs*" magazine, March 3, 2016, (http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2124391 - last access on 21.03.2018).

⁶⁶ Friedman George, 2010, *ivi*, pages 113-114.

⁶⁷ John Mearsheimer, “*The causes and consequences of the Ukrainian Crisis*”, Lecture of October 21, 2016 at MGIMO, Moscow.

trying to improve the diplomatic, economic and military ties with its Asian neighbors.

Moreover, Russia acknowledges the new systemic distribution of power worldwide, and after having opened its market to liberalism, reformed the military and started facing the problems derived from the fall of the Soviet Union, as the calculus of its capabilities has been revaluated, now it sees itself as a regional major actor and doesn't want to lose this regained status⁶⁸. Despite acting as a (neoclassical) realist actor, Russia theoretically trusts International Institutions and law, yet it is suspicious on the way other Western powers hypocritically use it to safeguard their own interest, as proved by the last decades of failures (from both sides). The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, enshrining the principle of non-interference as a pillar of Russian approach to international relations, reminded that "Western propaganda habitually accuses Russia of 'revisionism,' and the alleged desire to destroy the established international system, as if it was us who bombed Yugoslavia in 1999 in violation of the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act, as if it was Russia that ignored international law by invading Iraq in 2003 and distorted UN Security Council resolutions by overthrowing Muammar Gaddafi's regime by force in Libya in 2011"⁶⁹. As can be read on the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept, approved by the President of the Russian Federation, after having enounced the major trends of world politics, Russia stresses that "(18) the international community needs to respond to global challenges and threats in an adequate and comprehensive manner, and combine efforts under the coordinating role of the UN building on a shared recognition that human rights, security and sustainable development are closely intertwined. (19) A genuine consolidation of efforts of the international community requires a set of common values as a foundation for joint action, based on the common moral force of the major world

⁶⁸ Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248 - last access 22.03.2018).

⁶⁹ Sergey Lavrov, 2016, *ivi*.

religions, as well as principles and concepts such as aspiration to peace and justice, dignity, freedom and responsibility, honesty, compassion and hard work. (20) As a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a participant in a number of influential international organizations, regional frameworks, inter-State dialogue and cooperation mechanisms, the Russian Federation contributes to the development of a positive, well-balanced and unifying international agenda by relying on substantial resources in all areas of human activity and pursuing a foreign policy that actively seeks to develop relations with the leading States, international organizations and associations in various parts of the world”⁷⁰.

Nevertheless, while the dialogue between Russia and the West is hitting again its lowest point after the Russian Gate accusation and the diplomatic tension between Russia and the UK after the Skripal assassination, Moscow has to put aside its ambitions of being the juncture point as a pole of the multipolar system of a proper Eurasian economic integration. However, this does not prevent Russia to strength its alliances and trade in Asia.

1.2.1 Russian strategy in Asia and the Far East⁷¹

The Russian Federation restored in 1993 the coat of arms of the former Russian Empire and reused it as its own official emblem. It represents a dicephalus eagle grasping an orb and scepter, the traditional heraldic symbols of sovereign power and authority, whose heads are looking on opposite directions, symbolizing the double continental identity of Russia and its area of interests, located both in Europe and Asia. For this reason, it is natural to assume that Russia is an active actor in the

⁷⁰ Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248 - last access 22.03.2018).

⁷¹ This chapter is based on the information found in the book “Россия и страны востока в постбиполярный период (Russia and the countries of the Orient in the post-bipolar era), under the redaction of Dmitry Streltsov, Aspekt Press, Moscow, 2014; any different source will be reported.

region, especially in the Asia-Pacific subsystem. This paragraph then will briefly analyze the main trends and relations of Russia with its regional partners, outlining how its interest can compete or be complementary with Japanese ones.

Indeed, Russia's development of its own interests in the region is not a recent trend: already in Soviet times, the Central Committee established relations with several Asian countries, especially supporting the development of national-independence movements and financing infrastructure of the new-born nations in a bipolar perspective, seeking allies to oppose the West⁷². Even the investments and the growth of the Asian part of Russia were motivated by military objectives and a sort of shortsightedness: "in the 1970s and 1980s, the Soviet authorities established major military facilities in the region. Their presence and continued maintenance led not only to worsening relations with China, but also to the creation of new industries and social infrastructure in those territories, [as] the Baykal-Amur Railway [which] it offered an important backup to the Trans-Siberian railway that ran uncomfortably close to the Chinese border. Meanwhile, that border remained on 'lock down', thereby preventing the Soviet Union from actively integrating with the growing economies of the Asia-Pacific countries"⁷³. Only after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the establishment of a multipolar system and the shifting of global economy and finance to the Asian continent, with the consequent opportunities of development, it became clear to the Russian leadership that the Soviet strategy in the Asia-Pacific region was a failure. Under the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Evgeniy Primakov (1996-98) the "new course" of Russian Foreign Policy in Asia found its implementation and was for the first time conceptualized a strategic triangle between Russia, China and India to oppose the American unilateralism in world politics⁷⁴. This was nothing more than the embryonal idea of what later became known as BRICS, the format in which five of the most developing countries

⁷² Dmitry Streltsov et alia, 2014.

⁷³ Alexander Lukin, "Russia's Pivot to Asia: Myth or Reality?", *Strategic Analysis*, 40:6, 573-589, 2016.

⁷⁴ Dmitry Streltsov et alia, 2014, *ivi*.

of the new millennium met in New York City in 2006 (without South Africa), at the margins of the General Debate of the UN General Assembly, beginning a series of high-level meetings which were implemented in a full-scale diplomatic meeting in Yekaterinburg in 2009. However, many Western analysts missed the real point of the meetings, claiming that economy was the main reason that led the five countries to a closer cooperation. In fact, “the consideration of the opinions and interests of non-Western states in a move away from the dictatorship of the West and towards pluralism in international affairs”⁷⁵ was the actual basis on which the BRICS group formed, initiated by the geopolitical rapprochement of Beijing and Moscow. The article entitled “China and Russia set example for relations between major powers” published on December 12, 2015 by the official Chinese Agency Xinhua, comments positively the main achievements of the two countries, focusing on the resolution of the historical territorial disputes, the mutual trust in military affairs, mutual disarmament along the border areas, a strong political and legal basis for strategic cooperation and comprehensive partnership. Only afterwards it mentions economic cooperation⁷⁶.

While the main vector of Russian strategy in Asia is directed by geopolitical interests, also the economical aspect has an important implication for Russian national interest, as the Kremlin aims to develop the Asian part of Russia (composed by three federal districts: Siberia, the Ural and the Far Eastern Federal Districts), which has long been neglected. While improvements have been made in recent years, as the APEC summit of Vladivostok that in 2012 significantly improved the local infrastructures, investments from central government are still inadequate to cover such a big territory. For this reason, Russia is looking for a closer economic partnership with its Asian neighbors.

⁷⁵ Alexander Lukin, 2016, *ivi*.

⁷⁶ “Китай и Россия служат образцовым примером междержавных отношений (China and Russia serve as a model example of relations between powers)”, originally reported by Xinhua, November 12, 2015 (<http://russian.people.com.cn/n/2015/1112/c31521-8975278.html> - last access on 25.03.2018).

Indeed, India remains of Russia's favorite partners not only for the fact that it is one of the most predictable candidate to become a center of global influence, but also because India in the last decades developed and achieved a valuable specialization in the sphere of high-technologies, especially the ones related to software programs. However, the large amount of illiterate population, which still lives under the poverty line and amounted at 270 million in 2016⁷⁷, represents an obstacle to Indian economic development of the internal market, implying that most of high-tech production is destined to export. As India has great potentialities for the industrial development, paradoxically it doesn't have the means for the proper extractions of resources. On the other hand, Russia, from an historical perspective, is one of the most expert country concerning extraction of natural resources (about the 25-30% of the world incomes). However, the same economic structure based on the natural exploitation is an impediment to a further development and diversification of Russian economy. The "Oil curse" affects Russia in the sense that oil and gas are perceived as a "Godsend" and thus there are no incentives in diversifying the economy. There are also physical impediments for a traditional industrial development: low competitiveness of the basic labor force; adverse climatic and geographical conditions, because of which the cost of the units of production rises of 10-15%. Among the European capitals, Moscow lies in the most severe climatic zone, even Helsinki has a warmer climate. Thus, in the Urals and Siberia, from the point of view of the market economy, would be completely illogical the development of any other economic activity, for the exception of resources extraction. The solution for Russia would be the implementation of a post-industrial paradigm of growth. It is evident that Russia and India have complementary economic problems which can overtake through a reciprocal cooperation. But it is not only a matter of economics. Even though India and Russia share common interests in the cultural sphere, it is in the political and diplomatic

⁷⁷ India's Poverty Profile – infographic, World Bank official website (<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2016/05/27/india-s-poverty-profile> - last access on 25.03.2018).

arena that the two countries reach their climax of cooperation, as shown by the fact that in the UN resolutions, India never voted against a motion from Russia.

While the relations between India and Russia witnessed a development already in the '50s, when the Soviet Union supported the independence movements in the region, already in 1971 the two states signed a Treaty of peace, friendship and cooperation, according to which the two parties should not join any military alliance against the other. This was the first treaty of this kind for the Soviet Union signed with a non-socialistic state. The strength of the treaty was verified already few months after, when the Indo-Pakistani war broke out. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the geopolitical situation of India exacerbated, as many former Soviet Republics increased along other Islamic states the cooperation with Pakistan. For this reason, when in 1994 Russia changed its foreign policy strategy, and the position of the "Atlantists" became weaker, India welcomed this changes and the relation between the two countries deepened. In 1994-1995 was established a concrete mechanism for political relation. The political consultancy was restored and the systemic coordination for international affairs was initiated, while in 1998 a hot line between Moscow and Delhi was created. Few years later, during the visit of Putin in India in October, 2000, an agreement of strategic partnership was signed, along with other 17 joint agreements. Furthermore, both Putin and the Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, decided to establish a Russian-India summit every year. In 2002, during the second visit of Putin, the Delhi Declaration and the Joint Declaration on Strengthening and Enhancing Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Republic of India was signed, assuring the cooperation of the two countries in more than 146 projects regarding computerization, robotizing, hydrology, technological information, biomedicine, chemical industry, astrophysics and so on. This is only one part of the agreements signed between the two countries, and even though in the following years the number of specific agreements diminished, the cooperation between Russia and India didn't fade, especially as the latter is eager of Russian help in the fields of nuclear energy and cosmic technology.

Russia and India share a common position regarding various international problems, as for the situation in Syria, the nuclear program of Iran, the integration into regional organization as the SCO and the nuclear nonproliferation and security, this last point particularly relevant as India is a nuclear power since 1974 and nowadays is developing a program aimed at the construction of the Agni-3, a middle-distance rocket with a range of 3500km, which will be concluded with the construction of Agni-5 (which range is 5000km), even though it is rumored India is developing also an intercontinental ballistic missile, the Surya, with an estimated range of 8-12000 km. Moreover, the Military-technical Cooperation between the two countries is one of the pillar of their relations, also since India, the second military power in the world with about 1.4 million soldiers in service, is the main importer of Russian weapons (between 2003-2010 the Russian share of the Indian weapon market was about 59%, for a value of over 19 billion dollars). Nevertheless, the relations between India and Russia are not completely unhindered and the economic cooperation still struggles to reach the desired levels. Of course, Russian investments in the infrastructures and the gasification of the country are relevant, but the logistic impediments due to geographical conditions inhibit the development of a proper economic exchange of goods and cargoes by land. Also the aforementioned Russian market share, concerning weapons, fell from 40% to 20% in the years 2011-2014. Plus, for the Indian political elite is hard to believe that Russia is occupying a major role in world politics, while on the other hand Russia itself knows that India already forgot the help received during Soviet times, as well as the fact that if it didn't take enough action to improve the perception of its image abroad in the post-bipolar era. To conclude, it is clear that Japanese and Russian interests in India do not collide.

Despite Russia and China nowadays defines themselves as “strategic partners” since the signature of the 1996 treaty of Strategic Partnership, that eventually developed in 2001 into a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, the relations of the two countries haven't always been on high level, especially at the time of the Soviet Union. While at the beginning the relations with China were

determined by ideological factors that depicted Beijing as the “young partner” in the internalization of Communism, this provoked the reaction of China that started looking for an alternative way of development from the Stalin model. Hence, the bilateral relations evolved from an “unequal alliance” in the ‘50s to a “un-equilibrated confrontation” in the ‘60s and eventually into a “remote maneuvering” in the triangle USSR-USA-China in the ‘70s, especially after the Sino-Soviet split in 1969, raised by different ideological interpretations of Marxism, which culminated into the border conflict between the two countries.

It is only with the talks initiated in 1987 aimed at the signature of a delimitation and demarcation agreement in 1991 of the borders in the Asian part of Russia, during the State Visit of the Chinese leader Jian Zemin to the Soviet Union, that the bilateral ties between the two countries returned to normalization and started to coordinate their selves. In 1992, with the birth of the Russian Federation, Moscow and Beijing signed a Joint Declaration of the basis of the relations between the Russian Federation and the Chinese People’s Republic in which they declared to refuse force or the threat of force to resolve issues between them, not to join an alliance against the other and not to concede their territories to third parties that could undermine the security of the other. The relations with the direct heir of the Soviet Union were dictated by pragmatism and national interests instead of ideological bias.

The fall of the bipolar division of the world had consequences for the bilateral relations of Russia and China. Firstly, Russia started to pay more attention in the formulation of its foreign policy to China as recognized in it a new possible pole of regional power, endeavoring for a closer military and economic cooperation. These efforts culminated with the signature of the Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions on the 26th April 1996 in Shanghai, in which they took part also the leaders of the former Soviet Republics of Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan and Tajikistan, institutionalizing the regular contacts of the “Shanghai Fives”. During the meeting of the 16th July 2001, and the application of Uzbekistan, the leaders of the aforementioned countries founded the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, devoted to military and economic cooperation. It must be said, that the opening of Russia to

China, and the subsequent increase of trust, could be explained also by the fact that, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, new satellite states were established between China and Russia, especially in Central Asia, mitigating the perception of threats by the Russian leadership caused by the geographical conditions of their country. In 2006 the record of the Russian-Chinese relations was broken: during the year, they took place six official meeting, including the state visit of the President of the Russian Federation, three bilateral meeting at the margin of international events and two trilateral official meeting, once with Kazakhstan and once with India. And at the end of 2006, was held an online press-conference of the Deputy Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation in occasion of the Year of China in Russia, aimed at the Chinese internet public. Interesting to note that it was first video-conference held by Russia on such a high level, and it was directed exactly to China.

However, the strength of the new Sino-Russian alliance was already tested during the 1999 Kosovo Crisis. China promptly sided with Russia denouncing the NATO intervention in Serbia, as it proved that the Atlantic Alliance could easily pass the sovereignty of a state and exercise its own jurisdiction by appealing to the protection of human rights. In this context, China obtained by Russia the observation of the “four no” in relation to Taiwan: 1) do not support the independence of Taiwan; 2) do not support the conceptions of the “two Chinas” neither “one China, one Taiwan”; 3) do not support the adhesion of Taiwan to the UN or other international organizations and 4) do not sell weapons to Taiwan.

From an economic point of view, in recent years, trade with China decreases, in contrast to the expectations, considering both the good status of relations between the two countries and the Russian “Pivot to Asia” re-enforced after the Ukrainian crisis. However, “the argument that a decrease in Russia’s trade volume indicates that it is not pivoting to Asia is unfounded. First, Russia’s trade levels have fallen not only with Asia, but with all countries largely due to its own economic problems. While in the case of China, the paramount problem is the falling prices of its main export commodity, energy. The same was true after the crises of 1998 and 2008, but the subsequent upswings in Russia’s economic situation have always led to a

resurgence and even sharp increase in those indicators, with the result that China has ranked as Russia's largest trading partner since 2010. Moreover, trade volumes decreased in 2015 not only between Russia and its partners, but also for many countries of the world"⁷⁸. On January 13, 2016, At the seventh Gaidar Forum in Moscow, Russian Deputy Economic Development Minister Stanislav Voskresensky stressed that between OECD countries the export fell by 20.4% and imports by 20.8%. Compared to Europe, the same indicators fell respectively by 13.2% and 14.5 per cent, while Germany's trade volume fell by 12% and Japan's by 18%. Thus, the Russian–Chinese trade levels is just following the global trend⁷⁹. However, trade indicators are not the only relevant elements that must be considered when analyzing the economic relations between China and Russia. In fact, the Russian approach to Chinese investment has changed, permitting economic cooperation in areas once limited to Russia only. "In fact, Russian and Chinese companies signed several major deals during the final days of 2015: (1) the Chinese committed 700 million euros of investment in the Yamal Liquefied natural gas (LNG) project for the liquefaction of natural gas for export, even while the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) already owns a 20 per cent stake in Yamal LNG; (2) the Sinopec Group acquired a 10 per cent stake in Russia's largest gas-processing and petrochemical group SIBUR, along with the option of purchasing another 10 per cent in three years; and (3) a consortium of private Chinese investment funds purchased a 13.3 per cent share of Bystrinsky Transbaikal Mining from Norilsk Nickel. All of these deals, signed at the end of 2015, indicate that the Russian authorities are now encouraging Chinese investment in sensitive sectors that were previously forbidden"⁸⁰. Moreover, the weapon trade between Russia and China is growing as well, especially after 2014, as Russia sold to China S-400 surface-to-air

⁷⁸ Alexander Lukin, 2016, *ivi*.

⁷⁹ Conference on "Экономика Китая: Возможные Сценарии Развития И Стратегии Для России (China's economy: possible scenarios of development and strategy for Russia), held on January 13, 2016 at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_FC2swBKhY - last access on 28.03.2018).

⁸⁰ Alexander Lukin, 2016, *ivi*.

missile systems that was estimated to be worth at least \$1.9 billion, delivered in 2017. And one year later Russia agreed to sell 24 Su- 35s fighter jets⁸¹. However, despite the friendly declarations and high-level diplomatic relations, Russia is looking at China with a certain suspect. “Despite their reluctance to say so publicly, many Russian officials also see China’s growing power and assertiveness as a potential security threat, notwithstanding the growing confrontation between Russia and the West”⁸². What originally was conceived by Russia as a counterbalance of the US influence in the Pacific, soon spun out of control, with China turning to be more influent both on military and economic terms, overtaking Russian economy. Speaking about economy, it represents a blow for Russian elite, as China successfully implemented market reforms guided by economics principles and not by ideology⁸³. This undermined Russian perception of China, also because of the expansionistic aims of Beijing in the Central Asian market, Russian natural field of action, or Chinese penetration in Asian Russia: “the potential for Chinese investment to reorient Siberia and the Far East away from Moscow is one significant concern. So too is China’s rapid penetration of post-Soviet Central Asia, whose own hydrocarbon riches have allowed Beijing to drive a hard bargain with Moscow over gas sales. While Russia tolerates Central Asian gas going to China (where it does not compete with Russian sales in Europe), the resulting economic and political reorientation of post-Soviet Central Asia is a source of concern”⁸⁴. For this reason, Russia, in the attempt of stabilizing the multipolar world in which it hopes to have a stronger voice on an international level, could easily blink at Japan, China’s main opponent in the Far East, elevating it as an alternative pole of regional influence,

⁸¹ Vassily Kashin, “Why Is China Buying Russian Fighter Jets?”, Carnegie Moscow Center, February 9, 2016 (<http://carnegie.ru/commentary/2016/02/09/why-is-china-buying-russian-fighter-jets-su-35/itoe> - last access on 28.03.2018).

⁸² Jeffrey Mankoff, “Russia’s Asia Pivot: Confrontation or Cooperation?”, *Asia Policy*, Number 19, January 2015, pp. 65-87 (Article) Published by National Bureau of Asian Research.

⁸³ Mikhail Nosov, “Russia between Europe and Asia”, *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali*, Nuova Serie, Vol. 81, No. 1 (321) (January-March 2014), pages 15-34.

⁸⁴ Mikhail Nosov, 2014, *ivi*.

while avoiding to enter in direct conflict with Beijing⁸⁵. The trend of military exertations and naval drills enacted by China and Russia seems to confirm this scenario: “the size and scope of Sino-Russian military exercises has declined for many years even as Russia pursues opportunities to train with militaries from China’s Asia-Pacific rivals. For example, the annual Sino-Russian Peace Mission exercises, held under the auspices of the SCO, have become progressively smaller in recent years. In 2013, for example, only 1,200 troops took part, compared with more than 10,000 eight years earlier. [...] In addition, Moscow insisted that bilateral naval exercises held with China in July 2013 stay confined to Russian territorial waters. This decision apparently was motivated by alarm at recent Chinese incursions into the Sea of Okhotsk, as well as by a desire to improve relations with Northeast and Southeast Asian states that themselves have maritime territorial disputes with China. [...] Meanwhile, in 2012 Russia participated for the first time in the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercises with the United States and its partners from both sides of the Pacific, and in late 2013 the Russian navy held search and rescue exercises with Japan”⁸⁶.

The Republic of Korea (ROK), or South Korea, is included too in the strategy of Russia of diversification of trade, resources and center of powers, functional for the multipolar world and the containment of influence of China in the Far East and Northern Asia. Even though the Korean Peninsula is the area where the interests of four opposite powers (USA, Japan, China and lastly Russia) meet, and where in theory a war is still waging between the North and the South, Russia only recently established proper relations with the Southern counterpart and started evaluating the role of Seoul in the development of the Asia-Pacific region in the XXI century. In fact, the change of Moscow’s policy toward the Korean peninsula happened in the ‘80s, shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the Kremlin stopped to support North Korea unconditionally in its opposition to the South and the US,

⁸⁵ Hyodo Shinji, “Japan-Russia Relations in Triangular Context with China”, *The ASAN Forum*, November 22, 2013 (<http://www.theasanforum.org/japan-russia-relations-in-triangular-context-with-china/> - last access on 28.03.2018).

⁸⁶ Hyodo Shinji, 2013, *ivi*.

opening to dialogue. On the other hand, North Korea already took distance from the USSR when it opened to the West and this boosted the realization of its nuclear war program. After the dismiss of the world system of socialism, the security balance of the region was dramatically alternated. At the time, Russia neither had economic or political means at its disposal, nor gave to the region much attention because it didn't perceive the nuclear threat of North Korea as a real one. Nevertheless, already at the beginning of the '90s Russia revised its priorities in the area and launched a policy of good neighborhood in the Far East, looking for the development of multilateral cooperation, also with South Korea.

The beginning of normalization of relations between South Korea and Russia (the Soviet Union by the time) are marked by the speech of Mikhail Gorbachev delivered in Krasnoyarsk in September 1986, when he touched different aspects in the improvement of the relations with South Korea: the development of direct trade between the two countries, the liberalization of the visa regime, commercial agreements in the fields of civic aviation and maritime routes and the establishment of a telephonic contact between Moscow and Seoul. Later, the Soviet delegation took part in the Seoul Olympics in 1988, followed two years later by the opening of official representative institutions (both the countries opened their Chamber of Commerce and the Consulate in the partner's capitals), while in the same year Gorbachev and South Korean President Roh Tae-woo met in San Francisco in June. Alongside with new commercial and cooperation agreements.

After 1990, the relations between Russia and RoK developed in four different stages. At the beginning, the two parties overestimated the expectations, as Moscow waited for a solid economic cooperation and investments in the Asian part, while Seoul wanted Moscow to play a major role in the unification of the Peninsula. In the '90s, the reciprocal disappointment prevented further progresses, causing Russia to adopt a more pragmatic approach to the Korean issue. In the 2000s, the relations were characterized by an adaptation trend, as South Korea acknowledged that the hopes that Russia would have turned by its side were unreasonable, and at the same time Russia reconsidered in a more realistic way the benefits from trade and

investments with South Korea. The last stage developed since 2008, partially as a consequence of the growth of China both politically and economically on the international arena: the increase of Chinese-American rivalry and the exacerbation of the relations between Russia and the West put some limitations to the South Korean-Russian relations.

Indeed, the political bilateral ties witnessed ups and down: while in 1992 President Yeltsin during the visit to South Korea signed the treaty on basic principles between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Korea, the two parties engaged a mutual constructive partnership, and the Russians, showing the good will of their actions, gave to the Korean counterpart the registrations of the black box of the KAL007, a Boeing 747 operated by Korean Air Lines shot down by Soviet Su-15 interceptors after the violation of Russian prohibited airspace in September 1983. In 1997-98, because of an espionage scandal and the financial-economic crisis in Asia, the relations entered in a phase of recession, only to improve once again at the end of the crisis, at the same moment when the President Kim Dae-Jung introduced the “Sunshine policy” towards North Korea in 1998, which consisted in appeasing the North Korean regime with economic support, as the development gap between the two countries was becoming more and more evident. With the beginning of the “Putin Era”, the relations entered in a new phase characterized by a deepening of economic cooperation and political dialogue in the context of the development of a mechanism of regional security and normalization in the Northern-East Asia. Thus, in 2008 the relations between Moscow and Seoul were elevated to the level of “strategic partnership and coordination”, followed in 2013 by Putin’s remarks of the needs of a Eurasian integration during his visit in South Korea. The Republic of Korea, with the support of Russia, started then to invest in strategic infrastructures in the Northern part of the peninsula, receiving in exchange the Russian knowledge necessary to build the KSLV-1 (Korean Space Launch Vehicle, also known as Naro-

1), a carrier rocket that successfully launched the first rocket able to reach Earth orbit in 2013⁸⁷.

The Republic of Korea represents the third economic partner of Russia in Asia, even though Russia occupies for Korea only the 11th place for the export and the 13th for the import. Nevertheless, the value of the trade values 25 billion USD. Russia exports for the 80% metallurgic products, oil and its by-products, gas and wooden materials, while Korea exports chemical products, cars, means of transports and electronics, with about the 40% of it going directly to the Russian Far East. The Korean investments however, represent just the 1% of foreign investments in Russia, for a value of 2 billion dollars. After 2000, South Korea delocalized a Hyundai production plant near Saint-Petersburg, a LG Electronics and a Samsung Electronics factories in Moscow oblast' and Kaluga oblast', respectively, alongside with a chemical production plant in Tatarstan and a hotel built by the Japanese-Korean consortium Lotte in the very center of Moscow. However, Russia is more interested in South Korean investments in the Asian Part, as expressed in the Strategy of the Social-economic development of the Far East and Baikal region by 2025⁸⁸, trying to diversifying them from the Chinese ones. For this reason, Russia is pressing South Korea to take part to the Trans-Asiatic transit road, which is supposed to serve as an extension of the Trans-Siberian railway, crossing the Korean Peninsula and reaching the port of Busan, allowing cargos to reach Europe in 10-15 days compared to 30-40 days by sea route. On the other hand, Russia is offering to South Korea the export of over 2 billion cubic meters of gas from the Sakhalin oil field by a proposed pipeline that would not pass through North Korea, reassuring Seoul.

⁸⁷ *Xinhua*, "S. Korea successfully launches space rocket", January 30, 2013 (https://web.archive.org/web/20130204012038/http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2013-01/30/c_132138953.htm - last access on 29.03.2018).

⁸⁸ Sung Hoon Jeh, "Russian Far East Development and Directions for Improvement in Korean-Russian Cooperation: Korea's Perspective" in: Huang J., Korolev A. (eds) *"International Cooperation in the Development of Russia's Far East and Siberia"*, International Political Economy Series, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2015.

South Korea is another case in which Russian interests do not collide with Japanese ones, neither the rapprochement of Russia doesn't deteriorate the Japanese relations with Seoul, as the problems between Japan and South Korea are more related to historical issues and controversies, rather than a delimitation of sphere of influence. On the contrary, a more active participation of Russia in the North Korean issue and the entire peninsula, would provide a safe ground for further negotiations for Japan.

In conclusion, in this paragraph the relations of Russia with other three key-actors of the region have been analyzed, not only in contraposition to Japanese foreign policy in the region, but also to prove that the "Asian Pivot" of Russia is real, both in historical and contemporary terms. However, progresses are still developing too slowly, considering the double purpose of the Pivot, that is, on one hand, enhancing the multipolar distribution of power on an international level, that would allow Russia to have enough room for space rather than in a unipolar or bipolar system. On the other hand, with the Pivot to Asia, Russia would develop its further regions in the East, exploiting foreign investments and resources of its Asian partners, as it doesn't have enough resources to do it alone. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to affirm either that the Pivot to Asia is aimed also in substituting Europe as its first economic partner (despite the recent developments on the European front complicated the situation⁸⁹), or that the integration into the Asian-Pacific subsystem is a recent trend. Indeed, the relations with the West are constantly deteriorating since 2014 and this gave a boost to the Asian strategy, but Russia took part in the Asian integration process in the post-bipolar period since the birth of the Federation. The development of regional integration in the Pacific can be divided into three periods. The first one started as soon as the Soviet Union collapsed, implying the end of localized conflicts and proxy wars in the Far East, as in Cambodia. The Asian states started to pour the basis for new forms of regionalism and collaboration with each other, moved especially by economic interests rather than ideological, in conjunction with the soaring economic development of the so-called "Asian Tigers". In this

⁸⁹ Alexander Lukin, 2016, *ivi*.

phase, the Russian Federation, despite the thorny domestic situation, successfully strengthened the bilateral and multilateral ties with the countries of the South-East Asia. The second stage begins with the financial crisis of 1997-1998 and the loose of the strategic balance within the region. New driving forces appeared on the scenario, becoming centers of political, economic and military power. Noteworthy, in these years China substituted Japan and the US as dominant player of the region. New liberalizing trade agreements were signed between the states, both on bilateral and multilateral formats, as the Agreement on the zone of free trade between China and the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) in 2002. However, in this phase Russia could not take the chance of enhancing multilateral partnerships with regional states because of domestic economic crisis, despite Vladimir Putin took part as a host to the ASEAN+6 Summit in Kuala Lumpur in 2005, remarking the aspiration of Russia in being included in the regional cooperation. The last stage of the Asian regional integration started with another crisis, in 2008-09. The crisis demonstrated the efficiency of the existing economic cooperation and the stabilizing roles of China and India, causing a further change in the distribution of power and influence in the region. In this phase, Russia maximized its chances for an active involvement in the regional and global multilateral integration mechanism, culminating with the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) summit in Vladivostok in 2012.

1.2.2 Russo-Japanese relations: Moscow's perspective

In this context, how is Japan seen by Russia and which implications could come for the bilateral relations of the two countries?

As stated before, Russia and Japan share a common psychological trait, consisting in the double identity of their culture, divided between Asia and the West. While Japan used the contraposition with Russia to reaffirm the superiority of its Asian culture, triumphing in the 1905 war, and then its relation with the US to show its willingness of adopting and interiorizing Western values, the role of Japan in the

identity-construction process for Russia was marginal. However, this does not mean that it was peaceful for Russia neither. To explain the double identity of Russia, we can use the same Identity theory applied for Japan, which explains that the identity of a state is the result of the perception the other states have about it, or at least how they want to be perceived by the others. Even though for Russia, the identity-shaping process developed at the same pace with the establishment of conditions for its own national security.

According to Mikhail Nosov, Russia forged its dual, intercontinental identity throughout its secular history in six phases, closely related to the change of leadership in a lapse of time unfolding from the Rus of Moscow at the beginning, passing through the Imperial and Soviet Russia, until the current Russian Federation:

- 1- The Kievan Rus developed as a European state, through marriages and trade with the Byzantine Empire, France and other European kingdoms, reaching its apex with the Baptism of its rules in late X century;
- 2- The second stage starts with the Tatar-Mongol invasions from Asia (1223-1480), which subjugated Kiev, already a minor center of power in Eastern Europe, and the other Grand Duchy originated from Kiev. In this phase, the country was influenced by the Asian nomadic culture, which cut all the ties with the rest of Europe, making Russia impermeable to the cultural exchanges that revolutionized the Western states. Nevertheless, Russia kept its language, culture and religion.
- 3- With the proclamation of Moscow as the “Third Rome”, after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, while still under the Mongol yoke, Russia was likely to look at the West once again. However, “The Russian Church, having to make the difficult choice between the religious tolerance of the Mongol invaders and the potentially dominant influence of Rome, refused to join the Union of Florence in 1439, which separated the

Orthodox Church from the Eastern Church”⁹⁰, adopting an anti-Western behavior. Moreover, once defeated the Mongols, and having dissipated the treat from the East, Russia was deprived by its Western lands, conquered during the Golden Horde kingdom by the neighboring European states.

- 4- The fourth phase began with the capture of Kazan by the troops of Ivan the Terrible in 1552, marking also the beginning of the Russian territorial (and cultural) expansion towards the East, which ended only with the Japanese War of 1904-05. The Russian Empire at the time preserved the serfdom introduced in 1497, eventually abrogated only in 1861. For many of the local populations which lived in the East under the Mongol rule, their status of slavery didn't change with the Russians, fixing the psychology of Asian hierarchic subordination, while the upper strata of society had contacts with Europe, widening the gap between aristocracy and the people. The reforms of Peter the Great did not affect much of the population, even though they shifted the Russian intelligentsia toward Europe, through the foundation of a regular army and navy, modernization of the government system and the creation of the industry. However, this was accompanied by absolutism and feudalism, which at the same time kept Russia into the orbit of the Eastern despotism.
- 5- In the fifth stage, the October Revolution and the Communist ideals of equality among people and nations laid the fundamentals for the creation of a multiethnic and multinational Soviet Union, while, on the other hand, in absence of democracy, entire population where deported. Through intermarriages and internal migrations, the process of the creation of a Eurasian state and identity continued, eventually elevated to a supreme self-conception: all of them were, in the first place, Soviet people, nor Europeans nor Asians, and only then Uzbeks, Russians,

⁹⁰ Mikhail Nosov, 2014, *ivi*.

Ukrainians, Kazaks and so on. In parallel, the WWII and the Cold War strengthen the position of Russia against the West.

- 6- The last phase of the formation of a Russian Eurasianism is marked by the fall of the Soviet Union and the cession of sovereignty to the former Soviet Republics. With most of its population (80% circa) composed by Slavs, Russia became ethnically a European country. The events following the end of the Cold War and the tear with the EU and the US, however, made Russia rethink about its position in the world and its identity, with emerged as pure Eurasian.

According to history, then, the contacts of Russia with Japan were limited in the centuries, and only in the last century the two countries engaged war against each other. Therefore, Russia did not construct its identity using Japan, depicting it as “the other”. This had another important consequence: the relations with Japan, or the perception of its foreign policy in the Pacific, by the side of Russia at least, are not channeled by any prejudice or filter. Indeed, Russia and Japan were on opposite sides of the “iron curtain” that divided the world into the bipolar system, limiting the interactions of the two countries for decades. This did not prevent them to establish cultural and scientific ties in the ‘70s, albeit small, alongside with some agreements in 1973 concerning the development of some projects for the reclamation of natural resources in Siberia and the Far East and deposits of gas in Sakhalin and Yakutia⁹¹. However, once the Soviet Union collapsed, and Russia opened to Europe and the West, also the preconceptions matured in Soviet times toward Japan were erased. For this reason, Russian approach to Japan is more pragmatic than expected.

The data collected by several research institutes, including the Levada Center, showed how the perception of Japan in Russia, especially among the civil society, changed in the last decades. In fact, while at the time of Perestroika the US became a model of development and the overall opinion towards the United States was positive (about the 70-80% of Russians in 1990-1993 view Washington positively

⁹¹ Dmitry Streltsov et alia, 2014, *ivi*.

and only the 19% thought that it could carry an attack against the Soviet Union/Russia⁹²), the opinion toward Japan and other Asian neighbors of Russia, as China, was negative⁹³. After the Cold War, with the aggressive foreign policy of the US and the bombings in Serbia, a country culturally closely to Russia, the perception of foreign threats overturned. For instance, the number of Russians who believed Japan to be a military threat to Moscow shrank from 6% in 1990 to 0% in 2015⁹⁴, even though they refrained from defining Japan as a strong friend. Interesting are the result of a survey conducted from the Russia-Japan Society⁹⁵ in two cities of Irkutsk region to analyze the perception of locals toward Japanese people: “The age group (16–20 years old) was chosen because the younger generation grew up after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which means that its representatives are less susceptible to the influence of prejudices and stereotypes. A total of 407 people took part in the survey; 207 from Ust-Ilimsk, a young (even by Siberian standards) industrial city that is isolated from major centers and which does not have close cultural or economic ties with Japan; and 200 from Irkutsk, the capital of Irkutsk Region and twin city of Kanazawa, Japan, which has a rich history of relations with Japan. Respondents were asked to write three (or more) words that they associate first with Japan, and secondly with Japanese people.

The answers were almost identical for how the people of Irkutsk viewed Japan and the Japanese people (especially with regard to “culture” – the words sake, geisha, cherry blossoms, kimono, and samurai prevailed in both cases). Only 4 percent of respondents mentioned the territorial dispute over the Kuril Islands.

⁹² Russian Public Opinion Research Center, “Армия России-2015 (The Army of Russia-2015)”, (<https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=115431> - last access on 03.04.2018).

⁹³ Sergey Chugrov, “The Image of Russia in Japan and the Image of Japan in Russia: Working Paper”, Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), Moscow, NPMP RIAC, 2017.

⁹⁴ Russian Public Opinion Research Center, “Армия России-2015 (The Army of Russia-2015)”, (<https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=115431> - last access on 03.04.2018).

⁹⁵ “Japan through the Eyes of Young People in Irkutsk Region - Window to Japan”, *Email Bulletin of the Russia–Japan Society* No. 12, April 1, 2007, (http://www.ru-jp.org/goloshapova_01.htm last access on 03.04.2018).

Strangely enough, the image that the people of Irkutsk and Ust-Ilimsk have of Japan is more or less exactly the same. The survey also revealed that the younger generation is confident that it has sufficient knowledge of Japan and does not see the need to read novels by Japanese authors or watch Japanese films (perhaps this is due to a reluctance to destroy the familiar image they have of a medieval Japan). [...] The frequent references to the Kuril Islands and to Japanese whale poachers undoubtedly influence the formation of a predominantly negative image of Japan and Japanese people among Russians. At the same time, over the past decade, information flows have brought new factors to the forefront. These include the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster on March 11, 2011, Japan joining the anti-Russian sanctions, the rivalry between China and Japan, and Russia–Japan relations in the context of Russia’s strategic partnership with China. These news topics reflect the main issues that are dealt with in the Russian and Japanese media and which both shape public opinion and act as an indicator thereof. The psychological state of Japanese society after Fukushima has forced the media to pay attention to a new cluster of issues that concern the country’s scientific and technological achievements and the limits to which the human mind can control technology. [In general], it is clear that the perception of Japan has changed in the eyes of the Russian people, and it has become a “close neighbor” of Russia”⁹⁶.

This means that, as Japan does not pose a threat or an obstacle to the national interest of Russia, the two countries could cooperate in the multipolar world which is affirming itself on the global scenario, especially in Asia, where new powers and economies are rising, shifting the international center of powers into the Pacific-Indian subsystem. However, the territorial dispute concerning the Kuril Islands is still a hot topic in the bilateral diplomatic ties between the two countries. Nevertheless, the absence of a Peace Treaty is considered to be mostly a formal impediment, especially from Russia, and this allowed the development of diplomatic, economic and cultural ties, which could be deepened once the unredeemed lands issue will be resolved. The next chapter will analyze the

⁹⁶ Sergey Chugrov, 2017, *ivi*.

motivation, the point of view of both countries over Japan's claims and how the legal and political framework changed over time.

Chapter II

The Kuril Islands territorial dispute

2.1 The structural and systemic factors involved in the territorial dispute

2.1.1 Isolationism and geography as historical structural factors of reciprocal indifference

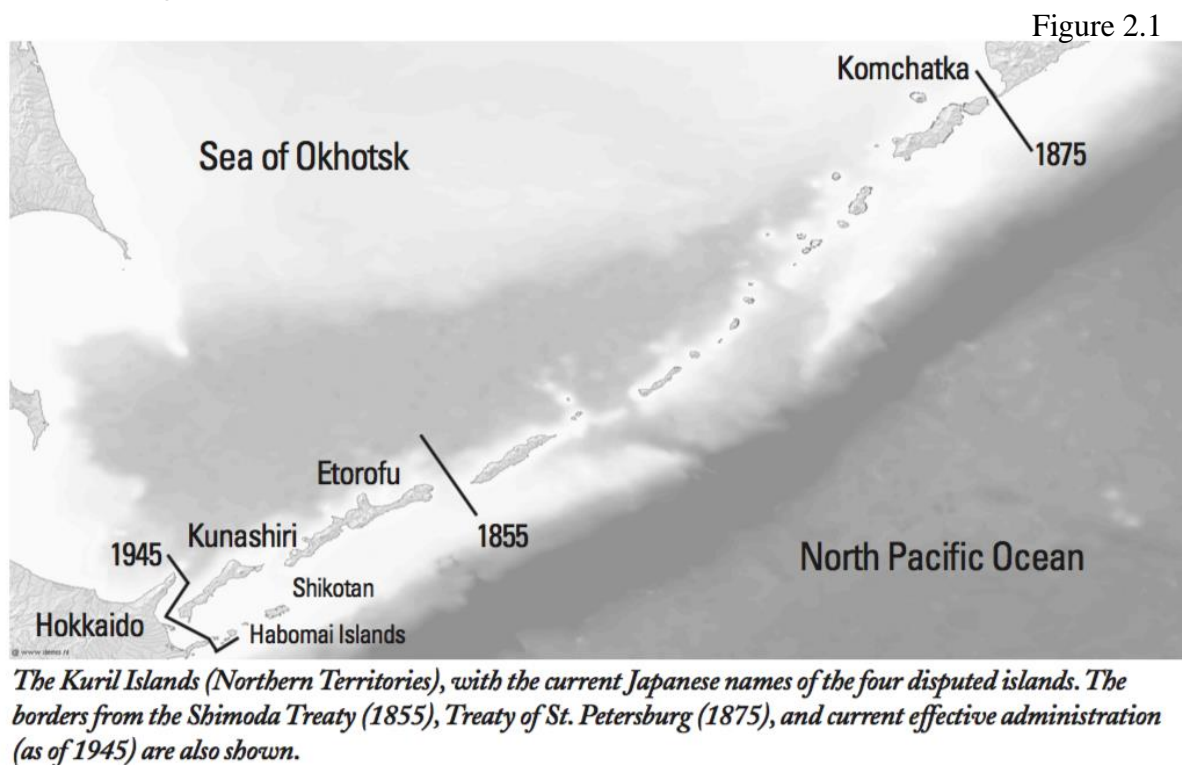
The relations between Japan and Russia were minimal for centuries, if not completely inexistent, until the signature of the “Treaty of Shimoda” (or Treaty of trade and friendship) in 1855⁹⁷. The interaction came so late because of two factual conditions: in the first place, Japan was still waging an isolationist foreign policy (*Sakoku*⁹⁸) which limited the diplomatic ties with all the other Asian or European countries until 1853, when the American Commodore Matthew Perry entered Tokyo Bay with a fleet of four black ships, forcing the Tokugawa Shogunate to open trade to the US and the West through the signature of a series of “unequal treaties”⁹⁹. Until then, only Dutch companies, China and Korea were allowed to trade with Japan, entering exclusively in designed ports (the biggest commercial hub at that time was Nagasaki). Official relations with other states, Russia included, were totally absent. The second reason why the relations between Japan and Russia developed lately, is due to the geographical conditions of the Russian Empire, which became a Eurasian power only with the expansion and conquest of Siberia and the Russian Far East, which occurred until the early 1800s. Thus, Russia entered in contact with Japan only in the second half on the XIX Century, formalizing the relations with the Treaty of Shimoda. The treaty, *inter alia*, officially established the borders between the two countries in the North of Japan, which correspond to the borders Japan would like

⁹⁷ “The First Diplomatic and Trade Treaty Between Japan And Russia Signed”, from the Russian Presidential Library website (<https://www.prilib.ru/en/history/619012> - last access on 05.04.2018).

⁹⁸ See chapter 1, page 6.

⁹⁹ Kenneth G. Henshall, “History of Japan”, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

to reestablish once the territorial dispute will be solved, between the islands of Etorofu (Iturup in Russian) and Urup. At the same time, the disputed island of Sakhalin became a territory for the coexistence of people of both countries¹⁰⁰ (see see below figure 2.1¹⁰¹).



After 20 years, in 1875, thanks to an agreement, Japan, in exchange for all of the Kuril Islands, renounced to all its rights over Sakhalin, which ceased to be a place of common dwelling. As a result, the border between Russia and Japan became more distinct between Sakhalin and Hokkaido.

In 1905, fifty years after the Treaty of Shimoda, Japan and Russia signed the Peace Treaty of the Russo-Japanese war, the Treaty of Portsmouth, according to which Sakhalin returned under Japanese control as a consequence of its victory in the Second Russo-Japanese War (1904-05). As remarked by Kazuhiko Togo, “Japan-Russia relations before the Pacific War were full of ups and downs. Periods

¹⁰⁰ A.V. Torkunov, M. Yokibe, D.V. Streltsov, S.V. Grishachev, N. Shimotami, «Российско-Японские Отношения в формате параллельной истории», MGIMO-Universitet, 2015.

¹⁰¹ Frank Jannuzi, “Japan-Russia relations through the lens of the US-Japan Alliance”, in “Japan-Russia Relations: Implications For The U.S.-Japan Alliance”, Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA, 2016, Washington, page 93.

of relative warmth and friendship were juxtaposed with direct military confrontations”¹⁰².

The succession of ups and downs in the Russo-Japanese relations perpetuated even after the Pacific War due to the rooting of pre-Pacific War characteristics. Indeed, the Japanese isolationist foreign policy, and self-centered culture, typical of insular states, became a structural factor in Japan’s relations with Russia, favoring the status quo. Subsequently, the geographical and demographic characteristics of the Russian territory did not favor an active foreign policy regarding the Far East and especially Japan, as the Russian Empire was more focused on Europe. Thus, these two structural factors allowed the coexistence of people of both countries on the Sakhalin, and later characterized the slowness of the negotiations.

2.1.2 The World War II and the San Francisco Peace Treaty as the prelude of the contentious

Nevertheless, the situation between the two countries exacerbated after WWII, when the unclear dynamics of occupation of the South Kuril Islands prevented Japan and Russia to find an agreement and signing a peace treaty. Indeed, the origins and the inability to resolve the dispute are due to systemic conditions, as generated by a war (which is always synonym of systematic change) and perpetuated by the bipolar order established at the time of the Cold War.

In the summer of 1945, during the last phase of World War II, before Japan surrendered on August 15th, the Red Army occupied South Sakhalin and all the Kuril Islands, between Kamchatka and Hokkaido. The occupation perpetuated also after that the Soviet Union collapsed and the Russian Federation took its place in 1991. However, the origins of the dispute lay in the many Conferences organized with the intention to establish a new world order once the War would be over, that eventually

¹⁰² Kazuhiko Togo, “Japan Foreign Policy, 1945-2003. The quest for a proactive policy”, Second Edition, BRILL LEIDEN BOSTON, 2005, pag. 252.

turned into a bipolar-confrontational system that crystallized the situation, making the pretenses of Japan void and radicalizing Russian position over the issue.

With the Cairo Declaration of 1943, the Allies agreed to deprive Japan of all the territories acquired by the use of force during the War, according to the Principle of the Atlantic Chart of 1941, without explicitly mentioning the Kuril Islands, but stated that “Japan will also be expelled from all other territories which she has taken by violence and greed”¹⁰³. For this reason, Japan claims that the Kuril Islands were ceased by Russia according to two bilateral agreements, and not as a result of a belligerent behavior.

In fact, when in February 1945, Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt met in Crimea at the Yalta Conference, in which the leaders of the UK and USA agreed to leave South Sakhalin to Stalin as a reward for joining the war in the Pacific, violating the Soviet-Japanese neutrality pact of 1941. Thus, South Sakhalin was never claimed back by Japan, which was caught by military action. In the meantime, in Europe the results of the Yalta Conference started to shaping the areas of influence of the USA and the USSR, with the initial purpose to guarantee stability in the continent, eventually emerging later into the Cold War.

After 6 years from the capitulation of Japan, in September 1951 in San Francisco the US and the USSR were ready to sign the Peace Treaty with Japan, although the confrontation in the political and military fields between the two powers, which reflected the new reality of the post-war order, became more intense and, subsequently, complicated the signature process. Communist regimes took power in China, in the Northern part of the Korean Peninsula and Northern Vietnam. Thus, the US tried to implement in the Conference the concept formulated by the US State Secretary Dean Acheson about the defense boundaries in the Pacific, according to which South Korea and Taiwan were sensitive states that could have fallen into Communist orbit. The US had to reinforce its military presence in Far

¹⁰³ “Cairo Communiqué”, Cairo, Egypt, December 1, 1943, National Diet Library official website (http://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/shiryo/01/002_46/002_46tx.html - last access on 06.04.2018).

East Asia in order to prevent this, while the war in the Korea Peninsula was still ongoing, as well as the civil war in China. As soon as these two wars assumed an international character and became the arena where the juxtaposed interests of the two superpowers entered into conflict, it became clear that the conception of the “Yalta system”, based on stability for the new world order, was a complete fiasco in Asia. In this context, Japan, from an enemy country, became strategically fundamental for the safeguard of American interests in the Pacific, as operative base for the US army. For this reason, the initial capitulation proposal of Japan was not accepted, as it would have prevented the US to extend its influence in the region.

With this rationale in mind, the US didn’t extend the participation to China, now ruled by the Communist Party. The Soviet Union, instead, took part to the Peace Conference with the aim to be sure that the pacts regarding the control over the acquired territories northern to Japan were observed, as agreed in the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Conference. However, because of the lack of the participation of China, Moscow had to rethink its strategy, and sent to San Francisco a delegation led by Andrey A. Gromyko (the next Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, from 1957 to 1985), characterized by its critical position toward the American-British conception of the Peace Treaty, and allowed him to try to correct the treaty, making it more favorable for the Soviet Union, as the article 2 of the Peace Treaty didn’t explicitly mention that the Kuril Islands would have been returned to Russia:

- “a) Japan, recognizing the independence of Korea, renounces all right, title and claim to Korea, including the islands of Quelpart, Port Hamilton and Dagelet.
- b) Japan renounces to all right, title and claim to Formosa [Taiwan] and the Pescadores.
- c) Japan renounces to all right, title and claim to the Kuril Islands, and to that portion of Sakhalin and the islands adjacent to it over which Japan acquired sovereignty as a consequence of the Treaty of Portsmouth of September 5, 1905.

[...]

f) Japan renounces all right, title and claim to the Spratly Islands and to the Paracel Islands.”¹⁰⁴

On the 5th of September 1951, Gromyko delivered a speech during the second session of the Conference, accusing the treaty to be against what already established in Yalta regarding the cession to the Soviet Union of the Kuril Islands and Southern Sakhalin and proposing another version of the treaty. About the territorial regularization, Gromyko stressed also that the treaty failed to indicate Taiwan and the Spratly Islands as property of China, and how this problem could have serious impact in the future, violating the legitimate right of Chinese people to reacquire territories severed from them as a result of Japanese aggression. Moreover, Okinawa and Ogasawara were planned to be controlled by the US, and in a second time to be taken by Japan, and this would be illegal. The American-British project, lastly, would have supported the rebirth of Japanese militarism, as there was no indication on the timing when the foreigner army would leave Japan, allowing in addition the presence of foreign military bases. According to the Soviet Union, the Peace Treaty was a prelude of an American-Japanese aggressive military alliance that eventually would have opened the way to the military influence of the US in the Pacific. Quoting Gromyko, the American-British project represented “not a Peace Treaty, yet a Treaty for the preparation to a new war in the Far East (*Американо-английский проект является не договором мира, а договором подготовки новой войны на Дальнем Востоке*)”¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰⁴ “*Treaty of Peace with Japan*”, San Francisco, US, September 8, 1951, UN web archive, (<https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%20136/volume-136-i-1832-english.pdf> - last access on 07.04.2018).

¹⁰⁵ “Основные документы - Документы для сборника материалов по истории территориального размежевания между Россией и Японией (Fundamental documents – collection of historical documents of the territorial delimitation between Russia and Japan)”, retrieved from the website of the Embassy of Japan in Russia (http://www.ru.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ru/san_francisco.html#2 - last access on 07.04.2018).

Despite the participation of the USSR and the strong speech of Gromyko, there was not made any correction to the peace treaty by the US, and the Conference ended with a mere signature of the invited countries. As China and the Koreans were not invited by the US, and its voice remained unheard, the Soviet Union protested refusing to sign the Peace Treaty, reinforcing the abnormal situation created during the war and persisting still today. The “fact [that at the time Moscow wasn’t unable to ensure to whom the islands should be returned and, thus, didn’t sign the San-Francisco Treaty] would later be used by Tokyo as a loophole in an effort to justify its territorial claims”¹⁰⁶.

In the meantime, while preparing to sign the Peace Treaty, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented some protocols in English language, previously arranged, regarding the status of the Northern Territories, as the Kuril Islands are called by Japan. The first protocol was already ready in November 1946 and showed how the islands of Kunashir and Etoropu were part of the South Kurils archipelago, while stressing that the islands of Habomai e Shikotan were part of Hokkaido instead, and thus they should be restituted to Japan as the result of the Potsdam Declaration, which stated that “Japanese sovereignty shall be limited to the islands of Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, Shikoku and such minor islands as we determine”¹⁰⁷. The diplomatic mission of Japan in the short time, thus, was to recognize the status of Habomai and Shikotan as not part of the Southern Kuril. However, the Japanese plan was more ambitious, and articulated in three parts, presented by the Government to the Japanese Parliament in March 1951¹⁰⁸:

- 1- “Restitution of two islands”. Shikotan and Habomai, as not part of the Kurils, should be returned to Japan, according to the Yalta Conference.

¹⁰⁶ Sergey Chugrov, 2017, *ivi*.

¹⁰⁷ Proclamation Defining Terms for Japanese Surrender, Potsdam, July 26, 1945, National Diet Library official website (<http://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/etc/c06.html> - last access on 07.04.2018).

¹⁰⁸ A.V. Torkunov *et alia*, 2015.

- 2- “Restitution of four islands”. Kunashir and Etorofu, despite being part of the Kuril archipelago, together with Shikotan and Habomai are part of the exclusive Japanese territory, as no other state exercised its sovereignty over them before, despite in Yalta they were promised to the Soviet Union.
- 3- “Restitution of all the islands”. When Japan accepted the conditions of the Potsdam Declaration and signed the Act of capitulation, at that time the contents of the Yalta agreements were not published yet and Japan didn’t express any compliance with them. In addition, in accordance to the Cairo Declaration, and the principle of non-expansion of its territories, Japan was not obliged to abandon all the claims over the Kuril Islands, as they were not added to its domain with the use of force.

Nevertheless, the efforts promised in the resolution were soon blocked in a deadlock by the mechanism of the Cold War, as the tensions between the Soviet Union and the US, the two designed poles of the bipolar system that was taking shape, were increasing. In fact, Japan and the URRS started the talks for the conclusion of the Peace Treaty in 1955, four years after the conclusion of the San Francisco Conference and ten after the end of WWII, with the territorial dispute taking a prominent role in the diplomatic process. Japan initially agreed to make a step back and accepted the weakness of its claim to Iturup and Kunashiri and agreed to settle on the return of Shikotan and the Habomai Islands, in exchange for a peace treaty. However, the US perceived that a rapprochement of Japan with the Soviet Union and the withdrawal of its claims as a reinforcement of Moscow’s position in Asia would be a threat to its influence in the Pacific and intervened in the talks, pressing Japan. The intervention was later known in Soviet diplomacy as the “Dulles blackmail”, after the name of the State Secretary John Foster Dulles. The US reminded to Japan that if it renounced on the restitution of Kunashir and Iturup, and accepting the proposal of the URRS, then the US could not guarantee the recognition of Japanese sovereignty over Okinawa. The intervention was based on two motivations: firstly, the US wanted to assure its control over Okinawa (where it

deployed its troops in the Pacific and established its largest military base of the region already by the time of the Korean war in 1951), as it would be more geopolitically strategic leave it to Japan, while using its military base; secondly, it wanted to prevent a Soviet-Japanese reconciliation.

Japan could do little rather than indulge American demands, and the enthusiasm of the first talks was attenuated. The Soviet-Japanese negotiations, thus, where influenced by the status of “1955 system” in Japan, characterized by a reflection on the domestic political plane of the Cold War, translated in the fact that two of the most Japanese conservative parties, the Liberal Party and the Japan Democratic Party, merged together under the name of Liberal-Democratic Party (LDP) with the aim to contrast the Socialist Party. Thus, Japan adopted a stronger position against the Soviet Union during the negotiations, but with little results. Nevertheless, “an attempt was made to find a way out of the impasse in the main document codifying relations between the two countries at the time, namely, the Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration of October 19, 1956, which was ratified by the parliaments of Russia and Japan”¹⁰⁹. Article 9 of the Declaration states that the USSR, “desiring to meet the wishes of Japan and taking into consideration the interests of the Japanese State, agrees to transfer to Japan the Habomai Islands and the island of Shikotan, the actual transfer of these islands to Japan to take place after the conclusion of the Peace Treaty between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Japan”¹¹⁰.

“The exhausting diplomatic marathon that concluded with the signing of the Declaration claimed two key Japanese politicians: that December, Prime Minister Ichiro Hatoyama retired from political life; and soon after, the chief negotiator for the Japanese side and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mamoru Shigemitsu, passed

¹⁰⁹ Sergey Chugrov, 2017, *ivi*.

¹¹⁰ “*Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Japan: Joint Declaration*”, Moscow, October 19, 1956, in “Treaties and international agreements registered or filed and recorded with the Secretariat of the United Nations”, volume 263, UN web archive, (<https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20263/v263.pdf#99> - last access on 08.04.2018).

away. Furthermore, in December 1960, Japan signed a new agreement on cooperation and security with the United States that strengthened the U.S. presence on the Japanese islands. Nikita Khrushchev was outraged by the news and Moscow radically changed its attitude towards Tokyo in response, refusing to honor its obligations under Article 9 of the Declaration. A long and painful period of entropy followed, during which Moscow stubbornly repeated that the ‘matter had been settled,’ and that there were insufficient points of contact for a compromise to be reached by the two sides”¹¹¹.

2.2 The conjectural factors influencing the territorial dispute resolution

While the origins of the dispute are indeed traceable in the systemic change of the world distribution of power, the two countries tried to find a solution and a rapprochement in the last phase of the Cold War. However, the failures are due more to the diplomacy and the incapability to converge the position of Japan and Russia to a meeting point. The causes, thus, are agent-centered, rather than structural. Indeed, the agents moved in the systemic framework and were subjected to its pressures.

After 1960, the Cold War enters a decisive phase: the Cuban missiles crisis and the Crisis of Berlin in 1961 worsened the already strained relations between the Soviet Union and the United States, increasing the possibility of the outbreak of a nuclear war. At the same time the international scenario changed with the reemergence of the economies which were destroyed by WWII and started a slow recovery afterwards. Western Europe regained influence in the world arena thanks to its economy, which became the training force of the European integration, started with the Treaty of Rome of 1957¹¹². On the other side of the continent, Japan witnessed a soaring of its GDP and industries, thanks to the impulse given in the first

¹¹¹ Sergey Chugrov, 2017, *ivi*.

¹¹² William Hitchcock, “The struggle for Europe – the turbulent history of a divided continent 1945 to the present”, Anchor Books, New York, 2004.

years of the '50s by the demand of materials to support the American troops deployed in Japan and engaged in the War of Korea, by the reforms implemented and the great amount of working force emigrated from the agricultural sector¹¹³. Thanks to the Japanese post-war economic miracle, Japan became the world's second economy after the US.

In fact, “after the conclusion of the Fisheries Agreement in 1956, Japan maintained stable relations with the Soviet Union on salmon fishing in the Pacific. [...] Total trade was almost nil when the relationship began in 1956, but soon it overtook America. By the middle of the 1960's, Japan had become an influential trade partner of the Soviet Union together with Italy, France, and Germany. In the second half of the 60's Japan became one of the leading trade partners with the Soviet Union, this time together with Finland and Great Britain and in 1970 and 1971 Japan became the Soviet Union's No. 1 trade partner amongst all Western nations. Japan almost exclusively imported such raw materials as timber, iron ore, coal, and oil. The Soviet Union imported machinery and equipment, pipes, textiles and household appliances. The total trade in 1970 was not gigantic, just over 650 million rubles (the official rate of a Russian ruble was usually fixed at just 10–20% higher than a dollar), but the trade structure was mutually complementary and trade relations with a central planned economy were stable and predictable”¹¹⁴.

In this context, the negotiations concerning the territorial dispute between the Soviet Union and Japan halted, as the diplomatic ties in general, being the two countries on opposite sides of the “iron curtain”. Nevertheless, the economic recovery of Japan gave the possibility to increase its weight on the bilateral relations, and the Soviet Union didn't prevent to establish deeper economic ties.

The improved economic relations were decisive to increase the trust between the two partners, resulting into an enhancement of the political relations as well.

¹¹³ Takafusa Nakamura, “The Postwar Japanese Economy: Its Development and Structure”, University of Tokyo Press, Tokyo, 1981, page 42; John Dower, “Empire and Aftermath: Yoshida Shigeru and the Japanese Experience, 1878-1954”, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1979, page 316.

¹¹⁴ Kazuhiko Togo, 2005, page 237.

Therefore, in 1985 begins a new course for the Japanese-Soviet bilateral relations, characterized by distention and a reprise of talks, inaugurated with the beginning of the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. Gorbachev inaugurated a new era for the Soviet Union, as he wanted to give new vital lymph to the Soviet economy through a shock therapy and sudden reforms. In order to improve domestic economy, Gorbachev tried to improve relations with the West and breaking the bipolar isolationism that characterized the relations of the Soviet Union after WWII.

2.2.1 The interpretation of the treaties

Despite the attempts of reconciliations of Russia and Japan, and the systemic structural conditions that influenced the actor involved, the two states failed to reach a compromise because of two main conjectural factors. The first one is the interpretation of the treaties and history.

In fact, according the capitulation concessions proposed by Emperor Hirohito, Japan demanded to be left with its primary territories, including the Southern Kuril Islands, renouncing to Sakhalin, the Northern Kuril Islands and well as Okinawa and Ogasawara. If Okinawa, which was occupied by the US, in ancient times was an independent State which paid tributes to China, then the Southern Kuril Islands, which were never subjected to a foreign sovereign state, yet inhabited only by the Ainu, the aboriginal population of Northern Japan, must be considered original Japanese territories. Unfortunately for Japan, this plan never turned into reality. In fact, while the Potsdam Declaration issued on 26th July 1945 by the Governments of the US, the UK and China, launched an ultimatum to Japan, declaring that after its capitulation, Japanese territories would be formed by the main islands of Honshu, Hokkaido, Shikoku and Kyushu, plus the minor islands of the archipelago. On the 8th August, two weeks after the signature of the Declaration, and two days after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, the Soviet Union joined the Potsdam Declaration and declared war on Japan. 12 hours before the second bombing on Nagasaki, the USSR invaded Manchuria and Korea. On the 14th August, Japan informed the Allies that it

would accept the conditions of Potsdam Declaration. By the time, the Southern Kuril Islands were not occupied yet. On the 2nd September, in Tokyo Bay, Japan signed the Act of Capitulation and the Potsdam Declaration entered into force. Three days later, when Japan already surrendered, the Red Army occupied Habomani, creating the preconditions for the territorial dispute.

The fact that during the San Francisco Peace Conference the Soviet Union failed to ensure that the South Kuril Islands had to be recognized as part of the Soviet territory, reinforced the position of Japan, which constantly used it as a loophole to retrieve the islands. Moreover, Japan claims that the Islands are Japanese by right, as were ceased peacefully by the Russian Empire through a legal-binding treaty. As a prove of the genuineness of its claims, in fact, Japan never asked South Sakhalin to be retrieved, as it was occupied by the Japanese army in war-time. On the other hand, the Soviet Union, and Russia later, have always been steady in its position, asking Japan to acknowledge the Kuril Islands as Soviet Union's spoils of war. Once Japan would admit it, then the Russian counterpart would be more willingly to find a compromise good for Japan as well. However, Japan too refused to give ground, and the negotiations were stuck in a deadlock for years.

Nevertheless, when the two parties agreed to resume talks in the 1985, another conjectural limit surfaced, as Japanese diplomacy is unable to deal with historical questions, and above all, to sever issues of different nature, as proved also in the third chapter with North Korea. In other words, Japan persisted in presenting always the territorial issue at once during other meetings or agreements, incapable to adopt a step-by-step approach, irritating Moscow.

2.2.2 The failure of Japanese diplomacy from 1985 until 2012: the five lost opportunities caused by conjectural agent-centered factors

The developments which occurred from 1985 to the early years of Putin presidency are well described by Kazuhiko Togo, former Japanese diplomat who served in Japanese embassy in Moscow and specialized in Russia since 1968, when he joined

the diplomatic service. Moreover, due to his knowledge of Russia, he participated in the talks regarding the territorial dispute and served. In his article “The inside story of the negotiations on the Northern Territories: five lost windows of opportunity”¹¹⁵, he analyzes the evolution of Soviet-Japanese relations providing a precious inner perspective. According to Togo, since 1985, Japan had five opportunities to solve the territorial dispute with Moscow. However, this time they all failed because of domestic political dynamics in both countries or a wrong diplomatic approach, not only because of systemic conditions.

The first missed opportunity coincides with the death of Konstantin Chernenko and the following election of Gorbachev as Soviet General Secretary. Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone promptly attended the funeral in Moscow on 13th March 1985, as a sign of openness and respect to the new leadership and the following day, Gorbachev and Nakasone had a meeting. This gesture was rewarded with the visit of the Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze to Japan on 15-19 January 1986, where stated that “he was prepared to listen to whatever his Japanese counterpart might say, even if he did not agree with its contents”¹¹⁶. “This did not mean that the Soviets gave an inch of their own position, but their readiness to talk was a warm breeze in the frozen relationship which had existed for nearly a decade”¹¹⁷. From that moment on, the official visits between the two countries intensified, and the Soviets started to be more assertive toward Japan’s claims. However, when in September 1986 Japan decided to join the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI, the missile defense system proposed by Reagan), Moscow strongly criticized Japan and Gorbachev refused to plan a visit to Tokyo. This was a proof that, despite the openness of the Soviet Union, Soviet leadership still saw the world divided in juxtaposed fronts, and the US as a greater threat to its national security. Moreover, the arrest of the members of a company affiliated to Toshiba which represented for the Soviet Union the provider of stealth technology for submarine

¹¹⁵ Kazuhiko Togo, “The inside story of the negotiations on the Northern Territories: five lost windows of opportunity”, *Japan Forum*, 23:1, 2011.

¹¹⁶ Kazuhiko Togo, 2011, *ivi*, page 126.

¹¹⁷ Kazuhiko Togo, 2005, *ivi*, page 244.

screws, worsened even more the relations. In addition, a mutual expulsion of diplomats took place in the summer, nullifying the improvements made in those years. From the Soviet side, however, Togo stresses that there was not enough interest to solve the matter, as Gorbachev was more focused on the Atlantic side and Japan didn't offer enough incentives. The failure can be also being addressed to the lack of proper contacts between individuals of the two governments, which could have avoided a possible break.

The second lost opportunity took place after two years of frozen relations, during which the diplomatic ties were at a minimum again. Nevertheless, when Gorbachev decided to eliminate the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces in December 1987 and, in April of the following year, he ordered the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, Japan acknowledged that it needed to take the initiative again. During Former Prime Minister Nakasone's visit to Moscow in July 1988, Gorbachev gave the impression that he was ready to start focusing on Japan. His opinion regarding the territorial issue didn't change, but at least he was ready to listen the Japanese counterpart. Many treaties regarding bilateral and regional issues were signed during that year, and was also established a working group with the aim of discussing the territorial issue thoroughly. However, the insistence of Japan annoyed the Soviets, especially when Foreign Minister Sousuke Uno raised again the issue during a conference on the abolishment of chemical weapons in Paris, in January 1989. Shevardnadze replied, angrily, that "it is not a good idea to link all issues to one question"¹¹⁸. The talks stopped once again. In this case, the reason behind Japanese insistence, and the subsequent fail, can be explained by a wrong perception the Japanese diplomacy had about the issue: they feared, that their openness could be interpreted by the Soviets as a concession and a softening of their claims, that would be turned into an agreement on the restitution of only two islands out of four. At this point, it was evident how the trust between the two countries was not enough to overcome possible incidents in the negotiations process. Moreover, as analyzed in the next chapter, it is a limit of Japanese diplomacy to treat all the thorny

¹¹⁸ Kazuhiko Togo, 2011, *ivi*, page 127.

issues at the same time, causing a consolidation of the opponent's position, who doesn't want to cede on the negotiations table. Nevertheless, the Japanese promptly reacted establishing a new principle for the guidelines of for Soviet-Japanese relations, called "balanced expansion", convening "that it did not want to see relations set back, but that it wanted development along the entire spectrum"¹¹⁹. Thanks to this new approach, finally in April 1991 Gorbachev visited Japan, although the domestic situation in the Soviet Union prevented him to take decisive resolutions toward the territorial issue. "Gorbachev came to Japan after all major East-West agendas were accomplished, such as the agreement to dismantle INF (1987), the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan (1989), the fall of the Berlin wall (1989), and the unification of Germany"¹²⁰. Japan had two objectives during this official visit: to induce Gorbachev to recognize that the dispute concerns all the four islands and to confirm the validity of the 1956 Joint Declaration. Gorbachev acknowledged only the first Japanese proposal, creating however the basis for new improvements for the developing relations. Gorbachev, in his memoirs, commented the visit stating that "the ice has moved"¹²¹.

By the end of 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed, preceded by an abortive coup d'état in August of the same year during which emerged the figure of Boris Yeltsin, obscuring the personality of Gorbachev. In this extraordinary historical context, also the Russian-Japanese relations have been affected. However, once again, Japan failed to approach Russia and solve the issue. Japan was ready to catch the chance to establish complete new relations with the newborn Russian Federation, the successor state of the Soviet Union. The Foreign Ministry outlined "three pillars [as the basis of the relations]: a new concept governing relations with Russia based on five principles announced by Foreign Minister Taro Nakayama at the end of September at the United Nations; \$2.5 billion of economic assistance pledged in early October; and a concessionary proposal made to the Russian side on the

¹¹⁹ Kazuhiko Togo, 2011, *ibidem*.

¹²⁰ Kazuhiko Togo, 2005, *ivi*, page 248.

¹²¹ Kazuhiko Togo, 2005, *ivi*, page 229.

territorial issue that ‘Japan is prepared to deal flexibly with the timing, conditions and modality of the transfer of the islands, provided that Japan’s sovereignty over the four islands is confirmed’, conveyed to Gorbachev and Yeltsin by Nakayama in his visit to Moscow in the middle of October”¹²². However, Russia made a counterproposal that the Japanese side refused, as it would have weakened the traditional Japanese position of “four islands in a bunch”. Yeltsin’s visit to Japan in September was cancelled four days before scheduled. Georgy Kunadze, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, commented that “in Tokyo we received a very cautious and, in fact, cool reception. Apparently, our Japanese counterparts were prepared to discuss nothing but the conditions and timetable of the transfer of all four islands, which in their view (which we found simply not true) was fully stipulated by international law. Amazingly, they were sticking to this same ‘residual sovereignty’ position that had already been **proven to be a patent non-starter**”¹²³. It took more than one year to overcome the setback of Yeltsin’s cancelled visit. Japan, in April 1993, launched a new package of economic assistance to Russia, by the amount of 1.82USD billion¹²⁴ and in July the PM Kiichi Miyazawa invited Yeltsin to the G7 Summit in Tokyo, treating him cordially. Japan was not intended to repeat the errors of the past, and partially succeeded. The Tokyo Declaration was signed, confirming what already agreed with Gorbachev (i.e. that the four islands are claimed by both sides) and adding three new principles to the negotiations: the principle of law and justice; the observation of legal and historical facts and of the documents already agreed by the two parties. However, from 1993 Yeltsin was absorbed by domestic issues, highlighting how Russian-Japanese relations were not on top of the political agenda of Russia. The negotiations halted again.

¹²² Kazuhiko Togo, 2011, *ivi*, page 127.

¹²³ Georgy Kunadze, “A Russian view of Russo-Japanese Relations, 1991–1993”, in Gilbert Rozman, ed. *Japan and Russia: the tortuous path to normalization, 1949–1999*. New York: St Martin’s Press, 2000, bold added.

¹²⁴ Hasegawa, Tsuyoshi, “Hopporyodo mondai to Nichi-Ro kankei”, Chikuma Shobo, Tokyo, 2000, page 314.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia naively believed that it could be accepted into Europe, that the ideological war was finally over. However, the enlargement of NATO and the Kosovo intervention made Moscow rethink its Foreign Policy strategy. This implied a turnaround to Asia, especially an improvement of relations with China¹²⁵. Russia was finally focusing properly on Asia, but Japan could still use its influence and alliances to keep Russia into the Western orbit and made it focusing on Japan itself. For this reason, PM Ryutaro Hashimoto agreed with President Clinton to let Russia become a member of the G8. At the G8 summit of Denver, in 1997, Hashimoto proposed to Yeltsin a meeting somewhere East of the Urals, to consolidate the mutual trust. This year represented a milestone for the Japanese-Russian relations, as the new approach pleased the Russian leadership. The two leaders met in Krasnoyarsk on 2-3 November 1997, where they agreed not only a plan of economic cooperation¹²⁶, but also to conclude a Peace Treaty before 2000. In the meeting at Kawana in April 1998, Hashimoto dared making an extremely important concessionary proposal, whose details are still not revealed. The MOFA, two years later, just declared that it concerned the delineation of the border between Eterofu and Uruppu, accepting the Russian administration “for the time being”¹²⁷. Yeltsin advisors, though, discouraged him to accept the proposal. In the meantime, Russia was hit by a financial crisis, Yeltsin health worsened and Hashimoto had to leave his office after the defeat of the LDP in July 1998’s elections. Yevgeny Primakov was chosen as Prime Minister and made a counterproposal to Japan, while Yeltsin’s conditions deteriorated further: Russia proposed to conclude two treaties, once introducing joint governance over the islands and the second resolving the border demarcation issue. Japan did not agree this as a basis of further negotiations. Hence, the fourth lost opportunity is represented by a Japanese decline of the proposal coming from the Russian side.

¹²⁵ See chapter 1, page 8.

¹²⁶ See chapter 1, page 33.

¹²⁷ *Asahi Shinbun*, 5 January 2005

On 31st December 1999, Yeltsin resigned, indicating Vladimir Putin as acting President. The Putin era begins, as well as the new page of Japan-Russian relations. Japan was still intentioned to conclude a peace treaty in 2000 and adopted a comprehensive approach, avoiding pressures on Putin. Thus, during his official visit to Tokyo in September 2000, Putin signed a paper as intended by Japanese side, declaring that the Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration was still in effect, a point negated by Gorbachev and avoided by Yeltsin. The talks were reinvigorated with a new spirit and lasted for seven months on different diplomatic and institutional levels, adopting a new format. The new Japanese strategy was renamed as “parallel talks”, as it indented to “talk about the issue of the transfer of Habomai and Shikotan and the issue of the sovereignty of Kunashiri and Etorofu in a parallel manner, like two wheels of a car”¹²⁸, influencing each other in a positive way. When PM Yoshiro Mori stated to Putin that Japan would never renounce to Kunashiri and Etorofu, Putin replied “let us see”¹²⁹. This meant that Mori’s proposal was not rejected, yet the answer was vague. However, Russia proved to be intentioned to solve the issue. While analyzing the various possibilities and diplomatic solutions, however, Japanese domestic political dynamics nullified the efforts. PM Junichiro Koizumi took office on April 2001, appointing Makiko Tanaka as Foreign Minister. Russian leadership had a wrong expectation on Tanaka, as her father, Kakuei Tanaka, achieved important results in the negotiations with Brezhnev in 1973. However, “not only did Tanaka scramble the policy direction, but she also imposed her will on personnel matters and openly reversed official assignments decided by her predecessor Kono. This added to the confusion in the ministry. The net result was the first real political turmoil. Muneo Suzuki, who strongly supported the proactive policy towards Russia, including the Krasnoyarsk-Kawana process and the Irkutsk Mori-Putin meeting, began to take an open stance against Tanaka”¹³⁰. Furthermore, Suzuki and Tanaka clashed during the Tokyo Afghanistan assistance

¹²⁸ Kazuhiko Togo, 2011, *ivi*.

¹²⁹ Kazuhiko Togo, “Hoppo ryodo kosho hiroku: ushinawareta gotabi no kikai”, Shinchosha, Tokyo, 2007.

¹³⁰ Kazuhiko Togo, 2011, *ivi*.

conference in January 2002 whether to allow the participation of an influential NGO. Eventually, Tanaka was removed from her office, but the Ministry leadership was afraid of the power Suzuki gained in his fight against Tanaka, and he was bashed as well, along with his closest diplomats. Including Kazuhiko Togo and Masaru Sato, the two most influential specialists of Russia. However, without the team of experts who allowed the improvement of Russia-Japanese relations during the past decades, the negotiations set back and Putin position was hardened after his reelection in 2004. Since then, the bilateral relations went up and down, with Japanese provocative statements and Russian hard demonstrations of power, as the September 2010 President Medvedev's visit to Kunashir, which represented the lowest point of modern Japanese-Russian relations.

2.3 Toward a new course

2.3.1 The achievements of the Putin-Abe era: the reasons and the limits

2012 could be considered as a watershed year for the negotiations between Russia and Japan. Vladimir Putin has been reelected as President of Russia in May, after a four-year break serving as Prime Minister under Medvedev's presidency. In December of the same year, Shinzo Abe was reelected as Prime Minister, forming a LDP right-winged government, after two center-leftist governments of Yukio Hatoyama (2009-10), Naoto Kan (2010-11) and Yoshihiko Noda (2011-12). Shinzo Abe, subsequently, won the 2014 and 2017 General Elections of Japan. This introduced an element of discontinuity with Japanese political tradition, characterized by short-life governments. In fact, since the end of WWII, 32 Governments ruled Japan. This data is in contrast with Russia (and previously the Soviet Union), where leaders are usually in office for years, especially due to the personalization of power. Furthermore, this reinforces the conception of Russia as a realist state, as the President embodies the will of the nation and gives the direction of Foreign Policy coherently. After all, Russian political tradition implies the need

of a strong leader and centralized power, able to keep a multiethnic and enormous country as Russia united. This partially explains the victory of Putin in the 2018 Presidential elections, making him one of the longest-serving Russian leaders. Nevertheless, Shinzo Abe was able to revert the trend, consolidating his leadership and inaugurating a hybrid model of diplomacy¹³¹, necessary to deal with foreign issues in a realistic environment as the Asian one. Regarding the Kuril Islands dispute, Abe's premiership positively impacted the negotiations: in fact, Russian leadership prefers to deal with stable and strong partners, for the same political bias that dominates the domestic politics. Furthermore, having a constant partner means that there is the possibility to build mutual trust between the leaderships and ensures the continuity of negotiations¹³². After all, the Japanese diplomacy already knew how to deal with the Russians, as Shintaro Abe, Shinzo's father and former Foreign Minister, made "an extra effort to leave his hospital bed to meet visiting president Mikhail Gorbachev. Paper-thin due to pancreatic cancer, Shintaro Abe wore coats and underwear that his wife, Yoko Abe, had padded to make him look less frail"¹³³.

For this reason, Abe tried to establish a personal relation with the Russian President, during the 21 official meetings they had, as proved by the behavior and episodes at the margin of the international meetings and summit where the two men met. For instance, many news agency have reported how Shinzo Abe was excited to meet Putin after the 2015 General Assembly at the UN¹³⁴, how the two leaders joked after a Judo demonstration at the Kodokan Judo Institute in Tokyo during Putin

¹³¹ See chapter 1, page 16.

¹³² See Annex I, "interview with Dmitry Streltsov".

¹³³ Tomohiko Taniguchi, "A Once in Sixty-Year Opportunity? Shinzo Abe's Approach to Vladimir Putin", in *"Japan-Russia Relations: Implications For The U.S.-Japan Alliance"*, Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA, 2016, Washington, page 47.

¹³⁴ Abe meets Putin at the margins of the 70th Regular Session of the UN General Assembly, originally covered by ANN News (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMeCAjKo2mY> - last access on 18.04.2018).

official visits in December 2016 to Japan¹³⁵, and when “Abe met Putin in Sochi¹³⁶, February 2014, a plan was taking shape that, come autumn, Abe would take the visiting president to his hometown, Yamaguchi, and, together, take a hot spring bath”¹³⁷, that, because of the developments of the Ukrainian Crisis, took eventually place in December 2016, when Putin visited Abe’s hometown in Yamaguchi Prefecture¹³⁸. Another symbol of Putin keenness to Japan, is Yume¹³⁹, the Akita Inu donated by Japan to Russia for the help after 2011 Tohoku earthquake. Putin and his dog are also depicted in the official 2017 calendar, which was sold out in Japan¹⁴⁰, confirming the popularity of Putin.

On the other hand, the President of Russia has been more cautious in showing his attitude towards PM Shinzo Abe, showing that their relationship is still among the boundaries of the diplomatic protocol, refusing courteously the numerous invitations and proposals of Abe, including a mate for Putin’s dog as a gift. The Kremlin, apparently, did not consider the refusal of the gift as a signal of toughening its negotiating position before the same December summit¹⁴¹. “Through such a behavior, Putin has been sending different messages to at least three audiences: to the Russian population, that during negotiations he would not yield to Abe for any kind of special personal treatment; to the Chinese President Xi Jinping, that ties between Putin and Abe are strictly formal, while China and Russia maintain special partnership relations; and to the Japanese PM Abe, that in future negotiations

¹³⁵ “Japan: Abe and Putin share a joke after Kodokan Judo Institute visit”, reported by *Ruptly*, December 16, 2016 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6ATwqDCmoY> - last access on 18.04.2018).

¹³⁶ Abe was also the only G7 leader to attend Sochi’s Olympics opening ceremony.

¹³⁷ Tomohiko Taniguchi, 2016, *ibidem*.

¹³⁸ “Japan: Putin and Abe set to relax at Nagato’s hot springs”, reported by *Ruptly*, December 15, 2016, (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSXLQuNbNY0> - last access on 18.04.2018).

¹³⁹ “Yume” means “dream” in Japanese.

¹⁴⁰ Magdalena Osumi, “2017 Putin calendar proving a hit in Japan”, *The Japan Times*, October 21, 2016 (<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/10/21/national/2017-putin-calendar-proving-hit-japan/#.WuBJqmZaZ-U> - last access on 18.04.2018).

¹⁴¹ “Путин показал свою Мечту (Putin showed his Dream)”, Daria Zorile, Valentin Loginov, Igor Kryuchkov, *Gazeta.ru*, December 13, 2016 (https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2016/12/13_a_10424729.shtml - last access on 19.04.2018).

Moscow would strictly adhere to the formula that Soviet and Japanese leaders agreed to in 1956, so please slow down and have more realistic expectations”¹⁴².

2.3.2 The present-day status of agreements

Despite the West, following the Ukrainian crisis and the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, tried to isolate Russia from the international community, and Japan too had to impose sanctions to Russia, the bilateral ties between the two countries remained solid. Initially, it was logical to supposed that the talks between Tokyo and Moscow were suspended and that the solution to the territorial dispute would have been set back. However, after a two-year break, from 2016 Japanese-Russian relations entered in a “golden era”. During the visit of Putin to Japan, both leaders provided a high evaluation of the visit’s achievement¹⁴³. “According to Putin, both countries agreed to do its best to improve political, economic, and humanitarian ties to achieve a higher level of true partnership not influenced by external factors. He made an emphasis on the formation of the joint Russia–Japan investments fund and the long list of bilateral agreements signed between ministries and business companies that would help to improve economic cooperation. As for Japan, Abe announced that the leaders had agreed to start discussions of a special system for conducting joint economic activities on the four Southern Kuril Islands in fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, medicine, ecology, and other businesses and that such future-oriented “new approach” would eventually bring a final positive outcome. Putin agreed that realization of those joint economic activities could cultivate mutual trust to successfully continue negotiations on a peace treaty”¹⁴⁴. Moreover, the two-plus-

¹⁴² Sergey Sevastyanov, “Hopes and Realities in Relations Between Russia and Japan: Is a Breakthrough Possible?”, in “*East Asia*”, Springer 2017.

¹⁴³ “Заявления для прессы и ответы на вопросы журналистов по итогам российско-японских переговоров (Statement for the press and answers to journalists’ questions about the Russian-Japanese negotiations)”, Tokyo, December 16, 2016, the Kremlin official website (<http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/53474> - last access on 20.04.2018).

¹⁴⁴ Sergey Sevastyanov, 2017, *ivi*, page 51.

two talks (with the participation of the respective Foreign Ministers and Ministers of Defense) reprised from 2014.

In April 2017, Putin and Abe met in Moscow, and the outcome of the talks reflected the positive developments of Russo-Japanese relations, based on two factors: the personal relationship of the two leaders and the fact that, despite the introduction of sanctions by Japan, Tokyo adopted “soft” sanctions that did not affected Russia so much. The Russians acknowledged that Japan, as member of an alliance, had duties to respect towards its allies and it could not recede from them. However, the Japanese government did not want to spoil the good achievements made in the past years, and opted for a less though solution, which was appreciated by the Russian intelligentsia. Thus, the April 2017 summit represents another milestone of the negotiations and the relations overall. During the meeting, many issues have been discussed¹⁴⁵. Regarding the peace treaty, the two leaders had a deep discussion and agreed to implement humanitarian measures for the former inhabitants of the islands. Especially from 2018 Japanese former residents have the possibility to visit the islands freely, and special grave visits by plane can take place. Moreover, Putin and Abe deepened cultural exchanges, establishing the “Year of Japan in Russia” and vice-versa in 2018 in order to improve mutual trust and reciprocal people comprehension. Economic cooperation in different fields was also a key element of the summit, important especially for Russia, eager of Japanese investments in its Asian Part. In an interview released to TASS¹⁴⁶, the Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono, highlighted that the documents for the implementation of more than 100 projects have been signed, and around 40 are already in process to be realized. The “Abe Plan” consists of eight different points, or area of cooperation: “(1) Extending healthy life expectancies, (2) developing comfortable and clean cities easy to reside and live in, (3) fundamentally expansion medium-sized and small

¹⁴⁵ Japan-Russia Summit Meeting of November 10, 2017, from the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, (http://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/rss/northern/page1e_000193.html - last access on 21.04.2018).

¹⁴⁶ Interview with the Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono, interview released to TASS, November 26, 2017 (<http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000312398.pdf> - last access on 21.04.2018).

companies exchange and cooperation, (4) energy, (5) promoting industrial diversification and enhancing productivity in Russia, (6) developing industries and export bases in the Far East, (7) cooperation on cutting-edge technologies, and (8) fundamentally expansion of people-to-people interaction”¹⁴⁷. Regarding economic development in the Kuril Islands, the two leaders agreed for closer cooperation on the four disputed islands, including exploitation of marine resources, tourism and electro-generation. Moreover, during the Eastern Economic Forum of Vladivostok, in which also Japan took part, Putin spoke about the plans to build a bridge between Sakhalin and Hokkaido in sign of peace¹⁴⁸. Such an infrastructure could also change the context of the territorial dispute, boosting the negotiations. In the meantime, Russian Railways reported that in 2018 will start the work for connecting Sakhalin to the mainland through an infrastructure bid, which could eventually be prolonged to Japan¹⁴⁹.

2.4 Considerations and future perspectives

With a retrospective glance to the recent history of Russo-Japanese relations, it is possible to affirm that under the Putin and Abe administrations more steps forwards have been made in the resolution of the territorial issue and in the improvement of relations overall, considering also the economic aspect. However, some observations must be done.

¹⁴⁷ Japan-Russia Summit Meeting of May 6, 2017, from the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, (http://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/rss/northern/page4e_000427.html -last access on 21.04.2018).

¹⁴⁸ “Putin Proposes Building Bridge Connecting Russia to Japan as Sign of Peace”, *The Moscow Times*, September 7, 2017 (<https://themoscowtimes.com/news/putin-proposes-building-bridge-to-japan-as-sign-of-peace-58878> - last access on 22.04.2018).

¹⁴⁹ “Russian Railways to Spend \$17 Mln on Bridge to Sakhalin in 2018”, *The Moscow Times*, November 22, 2017 (<https://themoscowtimes.com/news/russian-railways-to-spend-17-million-on-sakhalin-bridge-59661> - last access on 22.04.2018).

2.4.1 Economic ties as a mean of reconciliation in the context of the disputed territories

Firstly, experts condemn the prolonged absence of a real developing strategy or vision of the bilateral ties, both from Russian and Japanese side. “Neither Moscow nor Tokyo has its own strategic vision of the prospects for achieving a qualitatively new level of interaction and cooperation in line with new realities in both the Asia-Pacific region and the world. Russo-Japanese relations—after the disintegration of the Soviet Union—are twenty-four years old; however, their development has been heavily impacted by the more than one-and-a-half-century history of bilateral relations, starting with their first agreement in 1855. A “new” Russia and an “old” Japan have, so far, failed to realize their significant potential and embark on a trustful partnership, albeit the objective of achieving a “constructive partnership” has been set out in official documents signed at the highest level. The reason is that, while understanding, in general, the importance of bilateral relations, neither has grasped the strategic significance of these relations for itself. Thus, the level of political and economic interaction is pretty low, reducing real awareness of the value of genuine interdependence”¹⁵⁰. This prevented Russia and Japan to move forwards and adopting a common strategy suitable for the fast-developing regional scenario in Asia. However, as seen in chapter I, the two state’s national interests are not clashing, and this allowed Japan and Russia to keep high-diplomatic talks and speak about future partnerships. Japan and Russia are particularly complementing countries, as Russia has an abundance of natural resources, while Japan, a mountainous archipelago, lacks of them. On the other hand, Japan has the technologies and the know-how to renew the Russian economy, making the Russian market theoretically open to Japanese investments. However, the onerous bureaucratic apparatus of Russia, and the country corruption, rather than the territorial

¹⁵⁰ Alexander Panov, “A view from Russia on Japan-Russia relations in the mid-2010s; searching for a framework to move forward” in *“Japan-Russia Relations: Implications For The U.S.-Japan Alliance”*, Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA, Washington, 2016, pag. 34.

issue, restrained Japanese businessmen to venture in the Russian market itself. This leads the way to another paradox, partly subsequently.

Russia and Japan, despite the absence of a peace treaty, developed economic and political ties, they both have representations office in the other's country and they periodically hold inter-ministerial meeting. This means that the both adopted a more pragmatic approach and recognized the strategic importance of the counterpart, making the peace treaty irrelevant for further cooperation.¹⁵¹ Indeed the Kuril Islands play a central role is obstructing the process. The difficulty in reaching a solution is determined especially by the different relevance Japan and Russia give to the Kuril Islands themselves. For Japan, the restitution of the islands is a priority, and a matter of honor of all the successive governments which entered in the Kantei since the end of WWII. For this reason, Japan is unlikely to give up the claim, also for a matter of international prestige. For Russia the question is different. The islands do not represent an historical propriety, nor an economic revenue, as it would benefit from a more intensive trade with Japan once given the islands back, rather than exploiting their natural resources. As a matter of principle, Russia wants international law to be observed, and that Japan acknowledges that the islands now are propriety of Russia. But it does not mean that Moscow could not accept Tokyo's requests. Russia knows it, and is the one which leads the game, waiting for a luscious proposal from the Japanese side.

Considering the relevance of the economy of Japan, and the Russian need for economic development in the Far East, boosted economic relations could become an instrument to improve the mutual trust of the two parties and bringing them closer together. Thus, economic ties, which intuitively are usually absent between two belligerent countries, not only have always been present since the Fisheries Agreement in 1956, but they could be used as an instrument for peace, as also proved by the economic aspects and recent developments of the negotiations, from the eight-point Abe's plan to the most recent participation of Japan to the 2018 Saint

¹⁵¹ See Annex I, *"Interview with Dmitry Streltsov"*.

Petersburg International Economic Forum, during which Putin and Abe agreed on deepening the economic relations and cooperation in the Kuril Islands, as stated by the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry: “Japanese-Russian economic cooperation has gained unprecedented momentum. In all sections of the eight-point cooperation plan we can see transition from the “paper work” stage (that of preliminary coordination) to the “final shape” stage, having the form of specific contracts, etc. For instance, great results have been achieved in spheres closely linked with improving Russia’s living standards. In the health service we cooperate in increasing life expectancy. In urban infrastructures we cooperate in creating a friendly environment, first and foremost, easing urban congestion and traffic jams”¹⁵².

2.4.2 The relevance of the security aspect concerning the territorial dispute

However, respect of international rights is not the only elements that refrains Russia from coming to terms with Japan. The Kuril Islands, in fact, are potentially a strategic outpost for Russia’s security. In fact, “as a result of the planned rearmament of military units on the Kurile Islands, in November 2016 new shore complexes equipped with anti-ship missiles “ball and “bastion” were deployed on Kunashir and Iturup, respectively. [...] Interestingly, the high value of them for Moscow seemed to have been understood by Japan’s minister of defense Tomomi Inada. While addressing members of the Japanese parliament’s committee on security, she made the suggestion that Russia needs these anti-ship missile complexes on these islands to defend the waters of the Okhotsk Sea where Russian submarines are operating”¹⁵³. Talking about security, there is another reason why Russia would be reluctant to

¹⁵² Vasily Golovnin, “Hiroshige Seko: Russia-Japan economic ties gain unprecedented momentum”, TASS (<http://tass.com/economy/1005743> - last access on 04.06.2018).

¹⁵³ Sergey Sevastyanov, 2017, *ivi*, pages 50-51; Nikolay Grishchenko, “На Курилах развернуты ракетные комплексы “Бал” и “Бастيون” (On the Kuril Islands the missile system “Bal” and “Bastion” have been deployed)”, *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, November 22, 2016 (<https://rg.ru/2016/11/22/reg-dfo/na-kurilah-razvernuty-raketnye-kompleksy-bal-i-bastion.html> - last access on 27.04.2018).

cede the Kuril Islands, is the disagreement it has with Japan about Tokyo's management of its own state security. In other terms, Russia supports a multipolar world, and it is extremely critical of the fact that Japanese national security depends on the United States, for obvious reasons. During the March 2018 visit to Tokyo, Sergey Lavrov, commenting the acquisition by Japan of the Aegis Ashore System which would improve its BDM arsenal, said that "we [Russia] respect Japan's right to choose any means for protecting its territory, but we believe that actions by any country in this sphere should be based on the principle of indivisible security, which means that no country should strengthen its security at the expense of others' security. The global BMD plans directly affect Russia's security. We have agreed to continue this dialogue in a constructive manner and to listen to each other's arguments."¹⁵⁴ Indeed, the defense system is oriented to defend Japan from the North Korean nuclear threat, but Russia believes that it could be easily converted from a defensive to an aggressive system, and, as the MID spokesperson Maria Zakharova commented in August 2017, the "adoption of a decision to purchase and deploy these systems should be viewed as disproportionate to the real missile threats in the region [that] may undermine strategic stability in the northern part of the Pacific"¹⁵⁵. Russia cannot permit that Japan, once retrieved the Islands, allows US army to establish on them missiles defense systems. Moreover, it is worth noting that Russia is not against the amendment of article 9 of Japanese Constitution, but criticizes the military presence of the US on Japanese soil. After all, an armed but independent Japan is preferable and convenient for the establishment of a multipolar balance in the region, as Russia pursues. The security aspect will be further analyzed in the last chapter, with the North Korean nuclear program case study.

¹⁵⁴ Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono, Tokyo, March 21, 2018, from the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (http://www.mid.ru/en/press_service/minister_speeches/-/asset_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/3134000 - last access on 27.04.2018).

¹⁵⁵ Guy Plopsky, "Russia's Objections to Japan's Aegis Ashore Decision", The Diplomat, February 7, 2018 (<https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/russias-objections-to-japans-aegis-ashore-decision/> - last access on 27.04.2018).

To conclude, the territorial dispute between Japan and Russia lasts for over seventy years and highly influenced the relations between the two countries. However, the recent developments give solid hopes that a peace treaty could be signed before the end of Putin and Abe's terms, despite (or thanks to) the changes in the international arena. If this does not happen, then Japan and Russia could wait for many others years to reach a deal. From the Russian side, the reason why Putin procrastinated a decisive resolution, could be explained looking at the opinion of the Russian electorate¹⁵⁶. In fact, in recent years the public sentiment towards the Islands among Russians increased, while the popularity of Putin would diminish if concedes the Kuril Islands back to Japan. In 2018, having won once again the elections, and having expressed his desire not to candidate for a fifth mandate, Putin could take decisive moves for the resolution of the issue without negative consequences in electoral terms, leaving a legacy for future Japanese-Russian relations.

However, the real obstacle for the development of Russian-Japanese relation, though, was the different strategic weight that one country gave to the other partner: in fact, while Russia always deserved a priority place in the list of the strategic countries for Japan in its annual diplomatic bluebook, Japan on the other hand was never conceived as a prior partner, being named after South Korea and Mongolia in the various official development plans with the Asian partners. Thus, Russia has to overcome this lack of strategic vision with Japan if it really wants to sign a peace treaty and normalize the relations, while Japan has to offer more incentive to be under the Russian spotlight.

¹⁵⁶ Sergey Chugrov, 2017, *ivi*.

Chapter III

The North Korea Nuclear Crisis case study: opportunities and challenges for Russia and Japan's cooperation

The Korean Peninsula represents the area in North-Eastern Asia where the interests of six leading centers of power collide, causing a major instability not only in the area, but in the world order. Since the end of World War II, the Korean Peninsula was divided in two states, the Northern part led by a socialist regime, while the Southern part became a capitalistic democracy. Despite an armistice was signed in 1953, the two states tried to extend their influence on the other, backed by the Cold War superpowers, vaguely reminding the fate of post-war Germany. After the end of the bipolar order, the situation didn't improve. Without the nuclear protection of the Soviets, North Korea accelerated its nuclear program, already started in 1962, when the Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center is completed¹⁵⁷. Since then, the nuclear program became a source of instability and worries for the neighboring states. Hence, the Korean Peninsula became the field of confrontation of two opposite alliances, or "triangles": The Continental triangle, formed by Russia (and the Soviet Union before), China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; and the Ocean triangle, composed by the US, Japan and the Republic of Korea¹⁵⁸.

However, despite the direct confrontation of the two coalitions, no one is interested in changing the status quo apparently. China, the main interlocutor with Pyeongyang's regime after the fall of the Soviet Union, considers North Korea as a buffer zone in North-East Asia and the same privileged position enhances Beijing's status as hegemonic regional power, expanding its influence in matters of international issues. On the other hand, the US defines North Korea a "Rogue State", the major causes of world instability and accused to be responsible of several cyber-

¹⁵⁷ Derek Bolton, North Korea's Nuclear Program, The American Security Project, August 2012, Washington.

¹⁵⁸ Anatoly Torkunov *et alia*, Неспokoйное Соседство - проблемы Корейского Полуострова и вызовы для России (Restless Neighborhood - Issues of the Korean Peninsula and challenges for Russia), MGIMO-Universitet, Moscow, 2015, page 3.

attacks conducted on a worldwide scale¹⁵⁹. Nevertheless, the North Korean treat provides the US the excuse to keep a garrison on South Korean soil and consolidate its influence in North-East Asia and the Pacific Region¹⁶⁰.

Japan and Russia are secondary actors concerning the Korean issue, but this could be an advantage, giving them more room for diplomatic action. In this last chapter, the North Korean-Japanese and Russian relations will be analyzed, focusing on the challenges that Moscow and Tokyo could face together and the positive outcomes that can, in the long run, increase the reciprocal trust and have spillover effects on the relations overall. The chapter will also analyze the state-building process of North Korea, in the attempt to explain the latest changes of policy, testified by the opening to dialogue with RoK and the US that led to the historical Inter-Korean meeting and the signature of the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula on 27th April 2018¹⁶¹.

3.1 North Korea: historical background and the role of ideology in the State-building process

On 25th July 1950, North Korea invaded the southern part of the peninsula, causing the outbreak of the Korean War. By the time, Korea was already split into northern and southern part, as the result of Japan's defeat in World War II: the Japanese Empire ruled Korean Peninsula since 1910, committing abuses over the population, but also helping the country, once united, developing its industrial and transportation system. Approaching to the end of the war, many independence movements started

¹⁵⁹ Reuters Staff, "U.S. blames North Korea for 'WannaCry' cyber attack", December 19, 2017 (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-cyber-northkorea/u-s-blames-north-korea-for-wannacry-cyber-attack-idUSKBN1ED00Q> - last access on 15.05.2018).

¹⁶⁰ The United State Forces in Korea, official website (<http://www.usfk.mil> - last access on 15.05.2018).

¹⁶¹ Panmunjeom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula, April 27, 2018 (<http://www.korea.net/Government/Current-Affairs/National-Affairs/view?subId=641&affairId=656&pageIndex=1&articleId=3354> - last access on 15.05.2018).

to raise, using guerrilla techniques to rebel against Japanese domination. In 1945, after Japan withdrew its troops, the peninsula was divided between Russia and the US at the 38th parallel. Yet, with the onset of the Cold War, negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union failed to lead to an independent, unified Korea. With the Soviet Union support, the communists in North Korea gained more and more power, until the Communist Party, led by Kim Il-Sung, also a guerrilla militant chief, established its power and its leader became the first Prime Minister of the newly founded Democratic People's Republic of Korea. By 1949, South Korean forces had reduced the active number of communist guerrillas in the South roughly from 5,000 to 1,000. However, Kim Il-Sung believed that the guerrillas had weakened the South Korean military and that a North Korean invasion would be welcomed by much of the South Korean population. Stalin gave him the support he needed, arming the North, but asking for Kim Il-sung to wait a more favorable time to hit. Meanwhile, also China started supporting the Korean regime, not only because of a common ideology: in fact, Stalin stated that if Mao would had helped Kim Il-Sung in the Korean War, the Soviet Union would had provided China economic and military aids, which China desperately needed.

While frequent clashes between the Northern and the Southern armies were taking place on the 38th parallel, Kim Il-sung was consolidating his power thanks to the support of the Soviet Union until, at dawn on Sunday, 25 June 1950, the Korean People's Army crossed the 38th parallel behind artillery fire and invaded South Korea. The North Koreans had a combined arms force including tanks supported by heavy artillery. The South Koreans did not have any tanks, anti-tank weapons, nor heavy artillery, that could stop such an attack. On 27th June 1950 Seoul fell into the hands of Kim Il-Sung, despite the desperate strategic moves the Southern army made in order to avoid the defeat (the Hangang Bridge on the Han river was detonated, cutting any kind of connection between the northern and the southern part of Seoul).

The American response was sudden, even though South Korea's defense wasn't included in Truman's strategic plans for the Pacific stability. General Douglas MacArthur was sent along with the American army deployed in Japan in

order to reconquer South Korea's capital city. Thanks to MacArthur and the US, on 1953 North Korean invasion was thwarted, after a war lasted three years and characterized by a spiral of violence and many external intervention, as China's and United Nation's ones.

Thus, North Korea, after the armistice of Panmunjom in 1953, started developing its own state ideology, *Juche*¹⁶², enshrined eventually in the constitution of 1972, aimed to prove the goodness of the revolutionary spirit of the North Korean leadership, juxtaposed to South Korea, fell into the capitalistic American influence.

“Establishing *Juche* means, in a nutshell, being the master of revolution and reconstruction in one's own country. This means holding fast to an independent position, rejecting dependence on others, using one's own brains, believing in one's own strength, displaying the revolutionary spirit of self-reliance, and thus solving one's own problems for oneself on one's own responsibility under all circumstances”¹⁶³. In this words, Kim Il-Sung explains the meaning of the official North Korea's political philosophy, a creative application of Marxist-Leninist principles to the modern political realities in North Korea. As pointed by Kim Il-sung in another public speech (entitled “Let Us Defend the Revolutionary Spirit of Independence, Self-Reliance, and Self-defense More Thoroughly in All Fields of State Activities,” which he delivered to the Supreme People's Assembly on December 16, 1967), *Juche* is composed by three key elements, bounded together:

- *Chaju*, or Domestic and Foreign Independence. Theoretically, according to *Juche*, North Korea respects the international relations and claims equality among all nations, which they have the right of self-determinations. However, in practice, North Korea became an hermit State, as *Juche* forbids any kind of cooperation with external powers: yielding to foreign pressures, or tolerating them, undermines the defense of national independence and sovereignty. In fact, political independence is seen as

¹⁶² Grace Lee, “The Political Philosophy of *Juche*”, in *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs*, Stanford, CA, USA, 2003.

crucial for economic self-sustenance and military self-defense, the other two pillars of *Juche*.

- *Charip*, or Economic Independence. In order to get political independence, North Korea must reach self-sufficient national economy as well, which will provide integrity among citizens. A nation where wealthiest is equally distribute reduces the risk of internal rebellions or protests. Furthermore, Kim Il-sung believed that economic dependence on foreign aid would made the state a political satellite of other Countries (a vision shared also by the Neomarxist school of International Relations). The primary field where the investment were to be made was heavy industry (with machine industry at its core), followed by light industry, transport and agriculture. The latter had a specific meaning, as independent food production was seen as being of particular significance because successful farming would provide the people with stabilized living conditions and means to independently support themselves. However, Kim Il-sung recognized that the country needed foreign aids just after the war (as the ones America provided to South Korea, which equaled its economy's gross domestic product during the immediate post-war years) in order to survive. Thus, he encouraged close economic and technical cooperation between socialist countries and newly-emerging nations as an aid in economic development and ideological unity.

- *Chawi*, or Military Independence. The military doctrine of *Juche* could be summed up in the words that Kim Il-sung addressed to his own people: "We do not want war, nor are we afraid of it, nor do we beg peace from the imperialists". The decidedly belligerent policy of countering any perceived "imperialist moves of aggression and war" with violence was seen as the best way to defend national independence and to win the revolutionary cause. The implementation of this self-reliant defense system would involve the mobilization of the whole country and the complete inculcation of ideology in the armed forces. Those who were not directly taking up arms were to contribute to the construction and maintenance of the domestic

defense industry and remain ideologically prepared, so that the home front would be united in a sense of socio-political superiority.

The North Korean society presents other typical common features among the societies established by revolutionary parties, as Pol Pot's Cambodia. This model of society is called "closed society" and it was theorized by Italian sociologist Luciano Pellicani¹⁶⁴. The eight characteristics of a close society are:

Sacralization of tradition. By sacralizing Tradition, the values, ideals, and beliefs of a society take on a "sacred" and thus unalterable nature. Any deviation from the teaching of the "fathers" is considered an impiety or "sacrilege". As for North Korean state ideology, many scholars have acknowledged that *Juche* has its roots in Korean traditional political culture. Located in a geographic strategic position, the Korean Peninsula has always been the quarry of neighbor countries, China and Japan especially. The Korean people have fought fiercely to maintain their independence in the face of multiple invasions by Mongols, Manchurians, Chinese and Japanese pirates. Under the Yi Dynasty (1392-1910), Korea became a highly defensive state with a foreign policy focused on isolation towards the external world. That's the reason why also Korean culture as always been sheltered by foreign attacks and thus sacralized. Furthermore, Baek Nam Un, a Korean sociologist who later aided Kim Il-Sung, said that the situation in Korea requires an independent and creative interpretation of Marxism-Leninism doctrine, a synthesis of nationalism and socialism. Korean traditions are exhumed and sacralized through propaganda, in contraposition of the modern lifestyles and trends. For instance, the news anchor-men always cast the regime's announcements or news in traditional *hanbok* dress;

Isolation. As disclosed in the previous point, Korea has always adopted an isolationist foreign policy, extremely jealous of its independence and its culture. In order to prevent contagion with "other cultures" (especially the capitalistic one, adopting the regime's point of view), which are seen as bearers of alternative visions

¹⁶⁴ Luciano Pellicani, "Dalla società chiusa alla società aperta (From the closed to the open society)", Rubettino, 2002.

of the world, the closed society has to discourage any contact with the external world. Its boundaries must be “hermetic” so that the race of the “pure” does not run the risk of being “infected” by the corruption dominating the world;

Autarky. A closed society has to give up the things of the world and be self-sufficient. It is thus incompatible with the market economy and an enemy of its fundamental institutions. Private property, trade, money, and private initiative compromise its institutional balance, aimed at preventing change. Usually the figure of the warrior is set against that of the merchant. The former is seen as a “guardian,” while the latter is a “messenger” who, through “travel” and contact with the outside world, introduces new ideas and new models of behavior. No need to repeat that *Juche*’s principles lies on autarky and independence (political, economic and military);

Hypersocialization. In the closed society, individuals must be stripped of every autonomy of thought and become strictly conformist. They are what the group has established they are. Even the smallest “intuition” is a subversive idea to be forcefully uprooted. People gathered in public spaces, squares, stadia, obliged to hail their leader and praise the force of the nation are exhaustive examples;

Orthodoxy. Every belief has to conform to the dominant doctrines, dogmas, and institutions. Every “new” idea must be condemned because Tradition is an “enclosed” and “perfect” mental universe and any alteration would mean going toward barbarism;

Holism. The Whole must always be more important than its single parts. The interests of the community are more important than those of individuals. In the closed society, individual rights can never be rigidly fixed because the protection of the individual goes against the holistic principle of the individual in conflict with the community. A common trait of every socialist or communism regime;

Political centralization. Since it has to preserve Tradition and prevent change, the closed society is always autocratic and militarized. Power (political, economic, and religious) has to be concentrated in one unit to stop anything that could alter the balance of the system;

Misoneism. The closed society is against innovations in any sector. Creative people constitute a danger. Their ideas are “unpredictable” and as such risk introducing anti-traditional forms of behavior. The creativity of individuals must be “dried up”. The only exception is perhaps scientific innovation, however it is aimed to reach military supremacy.

A peculiarity of North Korean dictatorship is the cult of personality of the leader¹⁶⁵. Certainly, many others regimes have the cult of personality as a recurring characteristic. However, the North Korea’s one reaches a new level of worship, making North Korea an authentic theocratic State. This reflects the most traditional Asian political culture of the stratification and classification of society, where a strong hierarchy regularizes the interpersonal social relations.

Kim Il-sung is referred as “Eternal President of the Republic” and the State adopts since 1997 a *Juche* calendar dating from 1912, the year of Kim Il-sung’s birth. According to official biographies, Kim Il-sung came from a long lineage of leaders and official North Korean modern history focuses on his life and activities. He is praised to have defeated the Japanese at the end of the occupation of Korea alone thanks to its strategic skills (ignoring Soviet and American efforts) and to have rebuilt the nation after the Korean War. Over the course of his life he was named with many titles such as "Sun", "Great Chairman" or "Heavenly Leader", as well as awards like the "Double Hero Gold Medal". North Korean children were taught in school that they were fed, clothed and nurtured in all aspects by the "grace of the Chairman". Many elementary schools in the country have a room set aside for lectures specifically about Kim Il-sung. These rooms are built using high quality materials and have a model of his birthplace. The size of the images of him which adorned public buildings are regulated to be in proportion to the size of the building

¹⁶⁵ Lucy Williamson, “Delving into North Korea's mystical cult of personality”, BBC News, January 9, 2013.

on which they hang. Furthermore, His place of birth has also become a place of pilgrimage¹⁶⁶. What is the purpose of such veneration for the Head of the State?

First of all, Kim Il-sung wanted to legitimize his ascent to the “throne”: after the war, he took the power thanks to the support of China and Soviet Union, overwhelming any other political party or movement. He had to make his claim strong enough in order to leave no room for maneuver for opponents or critics, depicting himself as a godly leader. Moreover, the same political opponents and critics were physically eliminated.

The second purpose is to convince, with coercive methods however, Korean people that Kim Il-Sung, and his descendants, is the best leader North Korea could ever have. He is designed to guide them towards wellness, peace and prosperity, creating a new world order where no one is oppressed and mistreated by any capitalist nation. Every sacrifice is needed in order to reach these goals. And anyway, common people in North Korea nowadays lives better than in any other time of Korean history, according to the Eternal President.

The only way to convince the population and legitimate the leadership is inculcating a new system of values and wipe out any critical capacity of reasoning. The quickest and best way to achieve this goal, is using terror and violence. In a society where everyone controls the other because of the fear to be accused to have not reported a “criminal” action (where “criminal” is totally relative to the ideology’s dogmas: for instance, in Pol Pot’s Cambodia was considered illegal also thanking someone or living in cities, as typical bourgeois attitude, and hence able to corrupt the socialist society), it is established a climate of terror. Every single action or thought is pondered and weighted in order to not go against the dictatorship. As a result, the ability to formulate an own thought is eradicated from people, turning them into servants. This kind of violence is called “pedagogic”, as eventually, generation after generation, the lack of any perceived alternatives to conformity is

¹⁶⁶ KBS World Radio, *Kim Il-sung (1912~1994)*

(http://world.kbs.co.kr/special/northkorea/contents/archives/supreme_leader/kim_il_sung.htm?lang=e - last access on 18.05.2018).

matched by the constant reminder that conformity will pay off in both psychic and material rewards. When the agents, means, and any other sphere of socialization are subject to the ubiquitous control and surveillance of a political party that is wholly subservient to an indomitable leader, what hope is there of bringing up children who would challenge conventional wisdom and rebel against the status quo in thought if not in action?

And with the coercive consensus of population established through ideology, that includes violence and terror among its means to take root and get support, a single man could legitimate his claim to the leadership subjugating to his will institutions and citizens, who became rather mere subjects: this is how ideology is implemented in the State-building process. Consequently, the total absence of human rights in North Korea moved the international community, which applied sanctions on the regime, aiming to persuade Pyongyang to withdraw from its nuclear development program as well. Howbeit, the North Korean leadership continued undaunted on the nuclearizing path, which was the only way to defend the country from an American attack, as the one that destroyed the country in the war years: “the DPRK government never forgot the lesson of North Korea’s vulnerability to American air attack, and for half a century after the Armistice continued to strengthen anti-aircraft defenses, build underground installations, and eventually develop nuclear weapons to ensure that North Korea would not find itself in such a position again. The long-term psychological effect of the war on the whole of North Korean society cannot be overestimated. The war against the United States, more than any other single factor, gave North Koreans a collective sense of anxiety and fear of outside threats that would continue long after the war’s end”¹⁶⁷. The politics of Pyongyang, however, caused a mass exodus of North Korean citizens, which clandestinely eluded the state controls and passed the border with South Korea. It is

¹⁶⁷ Charles Armstrong, "The Destruction and Reconstruction of North Korea , 1950 - 1960", *Asia-Pacific Journal*, 8.51, 2010, pages 1–8.

estimated that, by the 2000s, in the Southern part of the peninsula live about 20'000 Koreans who fled from the regime¹⁶⁸.

The nuclear program of Pyongyang is a source of concern for the international community as the regime does not conform itself to the international law, and the closeness of its society and the leadership's decision making process. Nevertheless, when in 2018 the nuclear program achieved the desired results, Pyongyang knew that could sit at the table of negotiations on the same level of its counterparts, sure that the "Oceanic triangle" would renounce to overthrow the regime and unify the Peninsula under the aegis of Seoul. This indeed changed the perspectives on the future of the Koreas, making the involved States rethink their approach to the issue. The latest political developments could be explained by two different hypotheses: the first one, optimistically, assumes that the North Korean leadership is able to play in the international chessboard and is not blinded by its own ideology, as thought earlier. The second hypothesis takes in consideration the characteristic of the regime and the closed society, making the real intention of North Korea still unclear and, thus, unpredictable. This interpretation could assert that North Korea still interprets the international scenario with a binary code, with the US as the evil pole. Indeed, the withdraw of the US from the nuclear agreement with Iran, and the risk of a "Libyan Model"¹⁶⁹ enforces Kim Jong-Un's perception of Washington, nullifying the recent deeds of good will. Nevertheless, Japan and Russia should reformulate their strategies, having still their national interests at stake. Their approach to the North Korea nuclear crisis is an optimal way to analyze how the two states interacts when it comes to a matter of regional security, through the six-talks meetings for instance, and what could be the positive developments and advantages in a fast-changing context.

¹⁶⁸ Anatoly Torkunov *et alia*, 2015, page 47.

¹⁶⁹ Rick Noack, "Trump just contradicted Bolton on North Korea. What's the 'Libya model' they disagree on?", *The Washington Post*, May 17, 2018 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/world/wp/2018/05/16/whats-this-libya-model-north-korea-is-so-angry-about/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.3a4baa9212b6 - last access on 19.05.2018).

3.2 Japanese and Russian defense of national interests: the approach to North Korea

3.2.1 The particularities of the national interests in the North-Eastern Asia context

Prior to analyze what are the national interests of Japan and Russia in the Korean Peninsula, and how this could influence the reciprocal strategy, it should be opportune to define what “national interest” means.

Despite the concept itself of “national interest” took shape centuries ago, at the time when the State started to establish their sovereignty, in the second half of the XX century in world politics where theorized two different fundamental approaches to the definition of “national interest”¹⁷⁰. The first one is “objective”, formulated by the pragmatic school of political realism. The second one is “subjective”, outlined by the decision theory, focusing on the agent choices¹⁷¹.

Hans Morgenthau is one of the main scholars who defined the objective national interest, asserting that it is based on the geographical position of the State, and this determines its political, economic and cultural development. Moreover, his conception of national interest “includes ‘a residual meaning’ which is immanent in the idea itself, but over and above this minimum requisite, ‘its content can run the whole gamut of meanings which are logically compatible with it’”. Thus, the idea of the national interest has two factors. One is rationally demanded and, therefore, of necessity. The other is changeable and decided by situations”¹⁷².

On the contrary, the decision theory provides a definition merely subjective, stating that the national interest is defined by who takes decisions, thus depending on the individual reasons and the ethics of the political actors.

¹⁷⁰ Anatoly Torkunov *et alia*, 2015, page 108.

¹⁷¹ Katie Steele; H. Orri Stefánsson, Decision Theory, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Archive*, 2016.

¹⁷² Ken Kiyono, “A Study On The Concept Of The National Interest Of Hans J . Morgenthau : As The Standard Of American Foreign Policy”, 1969.

Nevertheless, looking closely at the essence of the national interest, we can conclude that it is represented by the coexistence of a complex set of measures aimed at the survival of the state as a system, the preservation of the national integrity, the governance of its institutions, sovereignty, economic model, national identity and culture, as well as securing the economic development and the well-being of the citizens and supporting the demographic balance. In sum, national interest can be characterized as the official expressed, objective and conscious need of the society and the state, which derives from national values and it is aimed at creating, preserving or achieving optimal conditions for its successful existence and confident progressive development¹⁷³.

Based on the needs of the state, the national interests are divided in:

- a- The expansion of the sphere of influence; which could be in the political, military, economic, information, cultural or ideological field;
- b- The consolidation of the temporary stability; could it be in the immediate period (up to one year), in the short-term (up to five years), medium-term (from five to twenty), long-term (from twenty to fifty) or in the distant future (from fifty years on)
- c- In terms of social significance and state relevance, which include elements of strategic and vital significance for the state and the society (preservation, restoration and protection on national values, whose reduction and/or loss could threaten the identification or even the existence of the people)
- d- On the basis of geographic limitations, could be it on the world, regional or local level.

All of these characteristics, and their relevance in the regional foreign affairs, are accentuated in the North-East Asia, which it is one of the most potentially conflict zones of national interests, perpetuated by regional and extra-regional powers, as the US. The area, without exaggeration, is a geopolitical and geo-economic hub, for the Far East as much for the entire Asian-Pacific Region, since it has decisive influence in the actual regional sub-system. Moreover, North-East Asia is in an active interaction with the external environment, especially with the South-East Asia and India, affecting its strategic balance. North-East Asia must be seen as

¹⁷³ Torkunov *et alia*, 2015, *ibidem*.

an international political region of fundamental importance, where the interests of China, Japan, North and South Korea unite. The United States too consider themselves as Pacific power, and they are effectively one of the most influential center of power of the region.

Because of a series of historical and systemic factors, North-East Asia has developed a sharp geopolitical rivalry between states, which attempted to achieve a balance among the other regional actors through the use of force. In this regards, North-East Asia has not the prerequisites yet for the formation of a strong military alliance for joint security. This is due to the following reasons:

- 1-Deficit of mutual trust. The North-Eastern states differ for culture, ethnicity, language, economic and political models. As long as these barriers will exist, it will be difficult for them to find a “common language” and overcome the obstacles.
- 2-Historical injuries and resentment. The states which are major involved in these feuds are Japan, China and Korea, and by a minor grade, Russia and China and Japan.
- 3-Also the systemic structure plays a major role. The region is overall characterized by the presence of numerous actors which try to gain the status of great power, combined with their high ambitions.

From a view on the macro level, the balance of power in the Asian Pacific Region is determined by the politics of the US, aimed to contrast the rising power of China, which claims to be the new regional hegemon and doesn't agree with the role the US self-attributed. Moreover, the balance of the sub-system depends also on the fact that this part of the world, and the geopolitical interests of the lesser states, has been regarded as unworthy of great attention until recently. The change is due to the strengthening of the opposition in the trilateral relations between China, the US and Japan and the rapid economic progress of the secondary states (that particularly occurred with the penetration of the regional giants into the industries of those states, and had the consequence to create mutual economic dependence). Moreover, the same lesser states in recent times increased their military effectiveness, as an attempt

to disengage from the powers which established the bipolar balance that regulates the system in the region, for the jointly achievement of matching interests¹⁷⁴.

As the Asian part of the Ring of Fire is where the politics will focus for the next decades, Japan and Russia have the possibility to extend their conception over the matter of national interests and play a major role for the conflict prevention and economic integration in the region through cooperation. For this reason, the Korean case can be the testing ground of their ambitions and possibilities to reemerge on the Asian region, which will be proved by their approach and coordination over the Peninsula.

3.2.2 The position of Japan

Japanese influence in the Korean Peninsula started in 1894, after Tokyo won the war over China and started its expansionistic militarism in the region. For this reason, Korean resentment towards Japan is still strong both in the Southern¹⁷⁵ and in the Northern part of the Peninsula, especially considering the war crimes perpetrated by the Imperial Japan, and the Korean people still try not to fall under Japanese influence. Nevertheless, Japanese economic presence in Korea is overwhelming: in the period between 1965-81, Japanese capital in South Korea consisted of 4.4 billion of USD, while between 1982-86, the capital increased by other four billion of USD. Indeed, it is thanks to Japanese investments that South Korea experienced an industrial and technical development that launched it on the global stage¹⁷⁶.

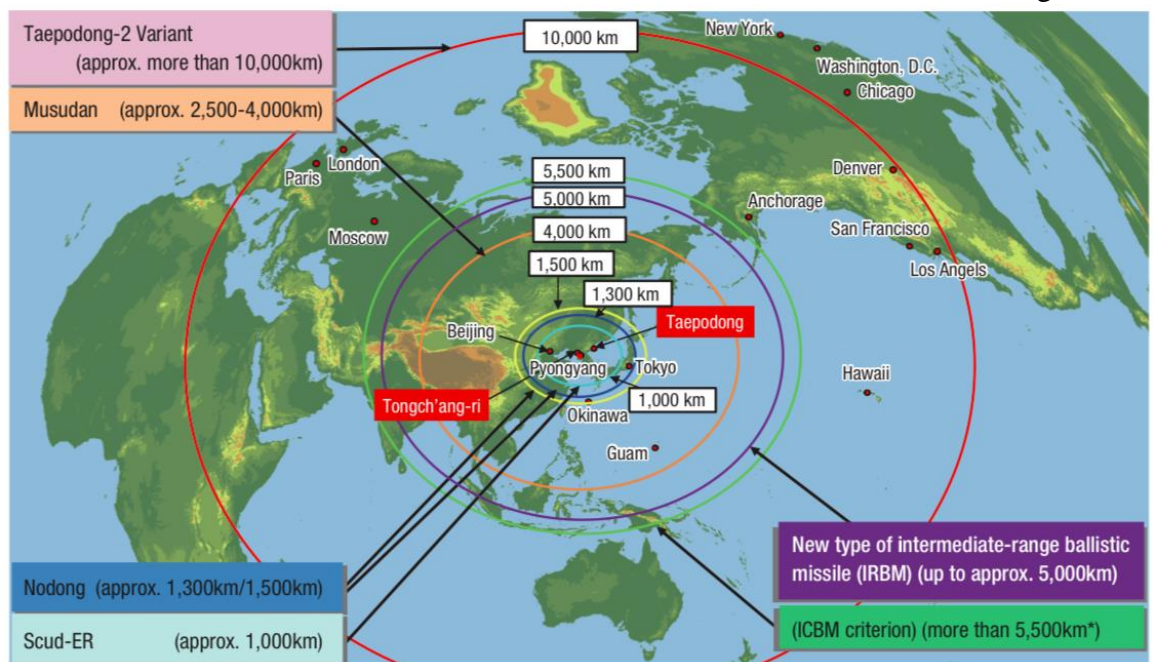
¹⁷⁴ Torkunov *et alia*, 2015, *ibidem*.

¹⁷⁵ See chapter 1, page 18.

¹⁷⁶ Torkunov *et alia*, 2015, *ibidem*, page 145.

Concerning the reunification of Korea, Tokyo recognizes that a unified state that could count on the technological development of the South and the rich natural resources of the North could pose a serious threat for Japanese economy, as the concurrence would be too strong. Maintaining the *status quo* would be more reasonable. On the other hand, Japan is directly threatened by the nuclear arsenal of North Korea, whose missiles could easily reach the Japanese territories (see figure 3.1 below)¹⁷⁷.

Figure 3.1



As reported by the White Paper of Defense, “Given that North Korea may also have achieved the miniaturization of nuclear weapons and acquired nuclear warheads, and that it has not wavered from its position of continuing its nuclear weapons program, it is deemed that with time there will be a growing risk of deployment of ballistic missiles mounted with a nuclear warhead, which have Japan in their ring range. It is the understanding of the Government of Japan that since 2016, North Korea’s development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles and

¹⁷⁷ Japan White Paper of Defense, 2017, from the official website of the Ministry of Defense of Japan (http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/pdf/2017/DOJ2017_1-2-2_web.pdf -last access on 17.05.2018).

enhancement of their operational capabilities have reached a new level of threat to the region including Japan and the international community”¹⁷⁸.

Hence, it should be on top of Japan’s priority to persuade Pyongyang regime to renounce the use of military threat and undertake economic reforms, as firstly tried during the visit of PM Koizumi in Pyongyang of the 17th September 2002. Despite the visit was agreed with the US administration, the positions of Tokyo and Washington were different, as the ruling elite of Japan didn’t support the vision of the US, which ascribed the DPRK to the “axis of evil”. The State Department followed nervously the negotiations, and eventually the State Secretary Kelly intervened, forcing Tokyo to introduce a series of conditions to continue the talks, especially concerning the nuclear development program¹⁷⁹. Nevertheless, the visit, concluded with the signature of the Pyongyang declaration, marked a turning point in Japanese-North Korean relations, proceeding to their normalization.

Nevertheless, apart from the US factor and the nuclear issue, another problem refrains Japan from improving the bilateral ties, is the abduction question. Between 1977 and 1983, seventeen Japanese citizens have been abducted by North Korea¹⁸⁰, probably with espionage intents as studying Japanese language and habits and eventually substitute the victims with North Korean spies. Japanese governments stress this issue at every meeting with Pyongyang, with the risk to irritate North Korea. Probably for this reason, the US decided to keep Japan apart during the latest diplomatic efforts in 2018 with DPRK. The issue of the abduction represented also a diplomatic incident after the 2002 Koizumi’s visits, as “on 24 October 2002, under strong pressure from some family members of the abductees, the Japanese government decided not to return the five survivors to North Korea”¹⁸¹. This halted the confidential channel between Japanese and North Korean authorities, and the talks stopped, especially after receiving another fatal blow, as Pyongyang admitted

¹⁷⁸ *Supra*.

¹⁷⁹ Torkunov *et alia*, 2015, *ibidem*.

¹⁸⁰ Official website of the Abduction of Japanese Citizens by North Korea Issue, (<http://www.rachi.go.jp/en/ratimondai/jian.html> - last access on 17.05.2018).

¹⁸¹ Kazuhiko Togo, 2003, *ibidem*.

to have continued the program for the uranium enrichment, breaking the Framework Agreement of 1994. North Korea restarted its nuclear program and Japan understood that negotiations with DPRK must involve a multiply of counterpart able to make coordinate pressure on Korea.

Overall, the Korean Peninsula represents the possibility for Japan to prove himself to be a regional power. Indeed, the Japanese approach must be pacific, in accordance with the democratic principles enshrined in its constitution. Moreover, resolving such a thorny and risky issue as the North Korean ones with pacific methods, could improve the opinion over Japan among its neighboring states. The best way to implement the resolution, it is through economic cooperation. However, while “the declaration [of Pyongyang signed in 2002] stipulates that economic cooperation will begin after diplomatic normalization, but it would be difficult to normalize the relationship unless outstanding issues—including the abductions and North Korea’s missile launchings and nuclear development program—were settled. In the context of the entire document, the portion on economic cooperation was almost disproportionately specific. The North Koreans made Japan present a specific framework for economic cooperation because Japan failed to include an amount for reparations and compensation. The Japanese, however, by providing very specific descriptions, aimed to stress that they would provide only economic assistance, not reparations or compensation”¹⁸².

Japan aims at three objectives in its approach to North Korea: the first one is to regulate and nullify North Korea’s dangerous foreign behaviors, rather than overturn the regime in North Korea. The second one is “to gradually change the nature of North Korea’s political and economic system. Signs of change in North Korea have been evident since 2001. North Korea partially followed China’s Deng Xiaoping in opening the window to domestic economic liberalization. In July 2002, Pyongyang’s policy shift started to take visible shape in such forms as the end of rationing and the hiking of salaries and of the price of rice. [...] Economic assistance provided by Japan should be used not only to contribute to economic revitalization

¹⁸² Norimoto Takano *et alia*, “Prime Minister Koizumi’s Visit to North Korea”, 2002.

in North Korea, but also to promote economic cooperation between the two Koreas, and thus bring about more open political and economic system in the North”¹⁸³. The third is the settlement of unfortunate past issues between Japan and North Korea, which eventually will contribute to the peace and stability in Northeast Asia, which directly influence Japan’s security. In this context, Japan, already at the time of the Pyongyang declaration, was “envisioning a multilateral framework, such as the six-party talks, regarding peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula”¹⁸⁴.

3.2.3 The role of Russia

Historically, the USSR was a privileged partner for North Korea, which received the nuclear protection of Moscow during the Cold War years. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, Russia tried to adopt an approach deprived of ideology and to reconstruct the relations with Pyeongyang according to its new principles of foreign policy. Thus, the bilateral ties evolved in three stages¹⁸⁵:

- 1- In the ‘90s, the new geopolitical situation had the consequence to sharply curtail the relations with DPRK;
- 2- Only in 2000, the relations were restored to the previous level;
- 3- The exacerbation of the relations with the US and the RoK, caused by the reprise of the North Korean nuclear program, led to the passiveness of the Russian policies in relations of the cooperation with North Korea in the middle of the 2000s.

In the beginning of the ‘90s, in fact, Russia already started an opening policy toward South Korea, that implicitly recognized the coexistence of both States, whose Russia was having good economic relations¹⁸⁶, causing the reaction of the North and halting all the possible political talks between Moscow and Pyongyang, worsened by the Korean nuclear program. Russia responded with a Presidential decree in 1993,

¹⁸³ Nakato Sachio, “Japan’s Shifting North Korean Policy under Koizumi Administration : Toward Responsive Engagement”, 2004.

¹⁸⁴ Norimoto Takano *et alia*, 2002, *ibidem*.

¹⁸⁵ Dmitry Streltsov *et alia*, 2014, *ibidem*.

¹⁸⁶ Various, “Korean Peninsula: Myths, Expectations and Reality”, Russian Accademy of Sciences - Insitute of the Far East, center of Korean studies, Moscow, 2001.

prohibiting to support North Korea with any kind of help in the nuclear sphere, comprehensive of scientific support. The DPRK ignored the Russian warnings until the second half of the '90s, when Russian Foreign Minister Evgeniy Primakov realized that it was time to stop ignoring the Russian interests in the Korean Peninsula. The restoration of the relations with North Korea on a de-ideological basis was the pragmatic mean to realize this objective. In the February of 2000, Russia and North Korea adopted the Treaty of Friendship, friendship, good-neighborliness and cooperation. In July of the same year, Putin visited North Korea. This was the first time in history that a Russian leader visited Pyongyang. The diplomatic talks were intensified, and the visit erased a series of longstanding preconception and theories. The first one, was the postulate that North Korea was a state suffering of deep diplomatic isolation, impossible to deal with, incomprehensive, unpredictable and, therefore, dangerous. In the second place, the idea about the irrelevance of Russia in the Peninsula, in relation with the fact that North Korea didn't want any contact with Moscow, was disproved. Lastly, the visit provided an alternative concept for the stabilization of the situation in the Korean Peninsula, which could occur only with the participation of Pyongyang, without pressure and blackmailing¹⁸⁷. Another considerable role that Russia played in influencing North Korea, was the demonstration of an alternative example of economic development: during his state visit to Russia in July-August of 2001, Kim Jong-Il travelled for one month on his bullet-proof train and encountering the new reality of the post-soviet Russia for the first time, which was already experiencing reforms. Once he came back to North Korea, he wrote a directive that eventually started an attempt of reform, from July 2002.

The following North Korea actions related to the nuclear fields (the nuclear crisis of 2002) let Russia no choice to gradually take the distances from Pyeongyang and avoid a direct involvement with the regime. The raise to power of Kim Jong Un did not changed the situation, although there were hopes for an opening of the

¹⁸⁷ Dmitry Streltsov *et alia*, 2014, *ibidem*, page 326.

regime. Eventually, in December 2013 Russia joined the international sanctions against North Korea, precluding further cooperation.

Nevertheless, Russia still has interests to defend in the Peninsula, especially considering that its action in resolving the Korean issue could give back political authority to Russia not only on a regional level, yet on the global stage. Russia plans to endure peace through economic integration, that eventually would benefit the Russian market and the development of the Russian Far East too and would make Russia one of the major player for the creation of a regional system of multipolar interdependence. Russian national interests in the Peninsula are the preservation of stability and peace, that can be achieved only through the conservation of the status-quo. Moscow can achieve these objectives thanks to the fact that Pyongyang still looks at Russia as an alternative partner able to protect it apart from China, according to the logic of differentiation of alliances. This makes Russia a guarantor of stability in the region¹⁸⁸, provided that it keeps good relations with both the Korean States. The option of a United Korea would be preferable only if it keeps neutrality and independence with the other states, which is unlikely: if South Korea would be the leader of the reunification process, then it would mean that the presence of US military bases could be extended to the whole Peninsula. Moreover, in the long term, China (and not Russia) will have a dominant position in the new Korean Economy. In absence of the certainty of this condition, Russia prefers the preservation of the status quo. Moreover, a possible reunification could pose a serious threat to Russian plans, as the financial resources Moscow is aiming at would be redirected to the rehabilitation of North Korea¹⁸⁹.

¹⁸⁸ Artyom Lukin, *interview with Arirang News*, “Inter-Korean Summit 2018: Russia's role in future of the Korean peninsula”, April 23, 2018,

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1VdjghTYQ0&t=181s> - last access on 20.05.2018)

¹⁸⁹ Richard Weitz, ‘Global Insights: Russia’s Positive Role in Korea Talks’, *World Politics Review*, 2011, (<https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/7732/global-insights-russias-positive-role-in-korea-talks> - last access on 20.05.2018)

It is worth mentioning that Russian interests are not against the other States, and this will allow them to keep the regional balance. In detail, Russian priorities are¹⁹⁰:

- 1- Deterrence of escalations and military confrontation on the Peninsula, nonproliferation of WMD;
- 2- Stabilization of the relations with Pyeongyang, which implies not only the preservation of sovereignty, but also the removal of North Korea from diplomatic isolation through the creation of the preconditions for socio-economic growth;
- 3- Growth of cooperation with the Republic of Korea in all the fields, mitigation of the “North Korean” factor in order to avoid the alienation of the political and economic partner;
- 4- Prevention and nullification of the external attempts for the domination of the Korean issue, which could entail destabilization;
- 5- Regular participation in the regularization of the Korean situation, including the promotion of multilateral talks and negotiations.

As stated before, Russia aims at the development and the interdependence of the market (especially the energy one) in North East Asia. To achieve this objective, its strategy consists in two vectors: the improvement of the transport infrastructure in the region and the construction of a gas pipeline who would connect Russia with South Korea, crossing the DPRK. The railway infrastructure is conceived as a three-party project of cooperation, aiming at the unification of the South Korean main rails with the Russian Trans-Siberian, which eventually would connect the Far East with Europe through the territory of the Russian Federation. Moscow has already invested about 300 million USD into the Rajin-Khasan project, which unites the North Korean and the Russian homonymous cities, but due to the political situation and the international sanctions, the project has halted. Regarding the project for the gas infrastructure, “the idea to create the pipeline was first discussed between Moscow and Seoul under Vladimir Putin’s presidency. Talks continued under Medvedev. In September 2008, Gazprom and South Korea’s Kogas signed a memorandum of mutual understanding, and in June 2009, Aleksey Miller and Kogas President Chu

¹⁹⁰ Torkunov *et alia*, 2015, *ibidem*.

Kang-Soo signed an agreement on a joint study of the project for delivery of gas to South Korea from the end point of the Sakhalin-Khabarovsk-Vladivostok pipeline. [...] During his talks with South Korea's foreign affairs minister in Moscow [on the 8th August 2011], Sergey Lavrov formulated this goal in the spirit of the idea that the construction of this pipeline will make a significant contribution to strengthening of security in East Asia”¹⁹¹. The project, thus, has an important political value, not only economical. Beside the fact that “the project may be unbeneficial for South Korea due to Gazprom's high spending on pipeline construction. [...] The 1,836-kilometer pipeline from Sakhalin to Vladivostok [is] an example where Gazprom will spend 467 billion rubles, or \$8.7 million, per one kilometer of pipeline”¹⁹². Moreover, costs for South Korea will increase as it must implement and create infrastructure for the gas consumption inside the country.

Viktor Larin, professor of the Russian Academy of Sciences adds that for years “people from different countries of the area spoke about cooperation, and North Korea is the only obstacle for this fast development and cooperation”¹⁹³. For this reason, Russia supports the restoration of the Six-Party talks, aware of the fact that it cannot solve the problem alone: a major and coordinated involvement of the other regional actors is necessary, as they would be able to influence economically and politically North Korea¹⁹⁴.

¹⁹¹ Aleksander Gabuyev, “North Korea to be pacified with gas”, originally published by *Izvestiya*, August 22, 2011 (https://www.rbth.com/articles/2011/08/22/north_korea_to_be_pacified_with_gas_12898 - last access 20.05.2018).

¹⁹² *Supra*.

¹⁹³ Viktor Larin, *interview with Arirang News*, “Inter-Korean Summit 2018: Russia's role in future of the Korean peninsula”, April 23, 2018, (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1VdjghTYQ0&t=181s> - last access on 20.05.2018)

¹⁹⁴ Aleksandr Fedorovsky, “Межкорейские Экономические Отношения и Интересы России (Inter-Korean Economic Relations and the Interests of Russia)”, in *Korean Peninsula: Myths, Expectations and Reality*, Russian Academy of Sciences - Institute of the Far East, center of Korean studies, Moscow, 2001.

3.3 The Six-Party Talks: analysis of a lost opportunity for Japanese-Russian multilateral political cooperation

Despite the other regional actors already envisioned the possibility of a series of multilateral summit aimed to resolve the North Korean issue, the initiative started from China. In April 2003, as Beijing was worried for an exacerbation of the regional situation, called for a trilateral meeting with the DPRK and the US, in the attempt of finding some common points on their positions. The meeting didn't bring the hoped results. Thus, a few months later, on 27-28 August 2003, thanks to the efforts of China, for the first time the representatives of the US, North Korea, South Korea, China, Russia and Japan met in the first round of the so-called Six-Party Talks (SPT). However, the expansion of the compositions of the members to six is due to the diplomatic initiative of Moscow, and supported by North Korea, which was hoping to use Russia as a counterbalance of the US. On the other hand, China itself didn't want Russia and Japan to participate in the talks, as they could have intercept the Chinese efforts and initiative, and gain diplomatic weight on the matter. Washington as well was more oriented on a four-party meeting (the two Koreas, the US and China). Only thanks to the position of Kim Jong-Il, and the high consideration he had about Putin matured during the years 2000-01, Russia was invited to the negotiations roundtable, where also Japan participated for the balance's sake¹⁹⁵. Thus, the SPT took their final shape. It is difficult not to overestimate the contribution of the SPT in the process of consolidation of the security system in North-East Asia. In fact, they represented an inedited multilateral format for the political cooperation in the region, as they introduced a multi-party regular interstate forum; they included almost all the actors involved in the area (except for Mongolia); they were dealing security issues and, lastly, they took decisions with compulsory juridical effects for the member states¹⁹⁶. The innovation of the SPT, moreover, was lying in the fact that, for the first time, the regional security was discussed in a

¹⁹⁵ Torkunov *et alia*, 2015, *ibidem*.

¹⁹⁶ Torkunov *et alia*, 2015, *ibidem*.

multilateral forum, and not according to a bipolar logic anymore, as the one which dominated the Asian scenario even after the end of the Cold War. The SPT took place in six rounds, from 2003 to 2007, while some rounds had more reprises¹⁹⁷.

While the first rounds of the SPT were pervaded with optimism and good will of the participating states, resulting in the positive promulgation of the Joint Declarations, the situation started to worsen in the spring of 2006. The US accused DPRK of the falsification of US dollars and imposed the freezing of a North Korean company's bank account (about 24 million dollars) in the Delta Asia bank of Macau, China. Pyongyang replied that it won't consider the bank issue and the nuclear one separately. By doing so, the US launched a clear signal to the other world banks: dealing with North Korean accounts could be dangerous for them. Thus, blaming the "hostile policy of the US", North Korea announced in October 2006 that it successfully conducted a nuclear test, necessary as a deterrent for the US. Other countries, as Japan, introduced economic sanctions on the imports, prohibiting North Korean cargoes to enter Japanese ports, and several financial restrictions on the activities of legal entities of the DPRK. Japanese-North Korean trade decreased from 500 million US in 2006 to 180 million in 2007. Moreover, the UN approved the resolution 1718 on 14th October 2006, introducing sanctions that ranged from the economic to the trade of military units, WMD-related parts and technology transfer, and a ban on certain luxury goods. Despite the SPT continued, the reciprocal trust of the participants was shattered, and in 2007 the party reunited for the last time, without setting a further date for the next meeting. This outcome was the result of several factors: in the first place, there was a change in the administration of Washington, which is always marked by a decline of foreign policy activity of the US and its partners, as they don't know what to expect from the new Presidency. In

¹⁹⁷ Chairman's Statement of Third Round of Six-Party Talks, originally reported by Xinhua News Agency June 26, 2004 (<http://www.china.org.cn/english/3rd/99447.htm>); Six-Party Talks on North Korean Issues, official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, (http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n_korea/6party/index.html); Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks, Beijing, September 19, 2005, official website of the US Department of State, (<https://www.state.gov/p/eap/regional/c15455.htm>) (last access on 23.05.2018).

the second place, the conservative party Hannara took power in South Korea, which changed its approach to North Korea, adopting a more resolute one. Thirdly, the SPT resulted only in the occasional implementation of the agreements reached, rather than the formulation of new ones. Moreover (4), in 2008 the health conditions of Kim Jong-Il worsened, and no decisive political action was taken by North Korea. Subsequently (5), the positions of the conservative ends of the North Korean leadership were strengthened, paving the way for a further militarization of the country. Lastly (6), there was not enough reciprocal trust to allow the parties to make concessions to North Korea without damaging their image on an international level and go against their own interests.

Being the first multilateral security forum in which Russia and Japan could interact directly, it appears appropriate to analyze their reciprocal behavior and positions inside the talks, focusing especially on the factors that prevented Russia and Japan to achieve considerable results on the bilateral front. In fact, despite the preconditions and common positions, the two countries failed to establish a solid diplomatic and coordinated partnership.

The reasons of this negative outcome, however, can be traced in a series of factors as the domestic decision making process of Japan, that prevented Tokyo to undertake a proactive position in the talks and marginalized Japan itself in the multilateral platform, despite being potentially one of the decisive actors, as it could provide a substantial economic aid for the development (and implied demilitarization) of North Korea.

In the first place, generally speaking, Japan had a little experience in the multiparty negotiations. In fact, for decades until the creation of the APEC forum in the 1989, “Japan almost exclusively adopted a bilateral approach for its relations toward countries in the region, and it came to view multilateral frameworks as doing more harm than good to existing bilateral ties”¹⁹⁸. Japanese activism of the late 1980s

¹⁹⁸ Kuniko Ashizawa, “Tokyo’s Quandary, Beijing’s Moment in the Six-Party Talks: A Regional Multilateral Approach to Resolve the DPRK’s Nuclear Problem”, in *Pacific Affairs*, 79.3, 2006, 411–32.

can be seen as an attempt of the country to play a leadership role in shaping a new regional order, thanks also to the new developments in terms of structural power status in relations to the other regional actors, as China, mainly through an economic boom, giving prospects for becoming a dominant power in Asia. “Japanese policy-makers, in pursuit of playing a regional leadership role commensurate with the country's major power status, consciously selected regional institution-building as a centerpiece of Japan's diplomatic activism at the time. It assumed that a multilateral framework would help to mitigate their Asian neighbors’ fears about Japan's possible malign intention to dominate the region, not just economically, but also politically and even militarily [...] since multilateral arrangements, as opposed to bilateral and unilateral ones, are less hierarchical and more cooperative”¹⁹⁹. However, Japan miscalculated the diplomatic mechanisms of a multilateral approach, and tried to bring to the other parties’ attention particular issues that would require to be dealt bilaterally as part of the normalization procedure of the relations between Tokyo and Pyongyang, as the abduction issue²⁰⁰. Indeed, the Japanese insistence was criticized by the other participants, namely South Korea, China and Russia, as counterproductive and obstructionist.

Particularly related to the SPT, there are three elements that prevented Japan to adopt an efficient policy. The first one is the nature of the issue discussed in the SPT: while Tokyo already participated in the process of institution-building of other regional fora, these fora were economic, generic and didn’t deal with security and crisis management. “Such a difference in the decision-making context likely affects the way policy makers prioritize their preferences for policy options: in decision making as part of strategic policy formulation [as in economic regional institutions], a policy preference with relatively long-term implications is generally prioritized, while the crisis-management context tends to override long-term policies with short-term policy preference”²⁰¹.

¹⁹⁹ Kuniko Ashizawa, 2006, *ibidem*.

²⁰⁰ See Annex I, “Interview with Dmitry Streltsov”.

²⁰¹ Kuniko Ashizawa, 2006, *ibidem*.

The second element deals with the composition of the actors, which significantly affects the outcome. In fact, in the SPT were involved the diplomatic representations of the parties, the families of the abductees, supported by several Japanese politicians, the media, and the world general public opinion. “This crowded policy-making arena reflects the long-standing thorny relations between Japan and North Korea, and their bilateral relations significantly affected the Japanese government's dealings with the SPT”²⁰².

Thirdly, the decision-making process of the SPT privileged, and to a certain extent confined, the Japanese diplomacy to use only economic leverage, as a mean to persuade North Korea to abandon the nuclear path. But economic aids and sanctions have their limits: in fact, economic aid is a mostly action-less option, as it deals with future expectation and it has to wait that all parties arrive at the stage where they are ready to begin negotiations for a solid arrangement for economic packages. Moreover, as once a promise of economic aid is made in concrete form, the value of the proposal tends to diminish dramatically for future diplomatic pressure. Further, the use of future economic aid leverage is less effective in a multilateral agreement rather than in a bilateral one. In a multilateral setting, there is always the possibility that a collective action and incentives from other participants will be proposed to another country able to provide economic leverage to facilitate an arrangement (providing substantial economic aid), even though the first country's interests are left out from that agreement. More concretely, “Japan may face a situation in which other participants decide they are prepared to offer economic or energy assistance to North Korea and place pressures on Japan to do so, even though there is no progress on the abductions problem”²⁰³. This explains the difficulty of Japanese diplomacy to predominate in the SPT framework. On the other hand, sanctions have been proved to be ineffective (or even counterproductive) to persuade the North Korean leadership to change its policies.

²⁰² Kuniko Ashizawa, 2006, *ibidem*.

²⁰³ Kuniko Ashizawa, 2006, *ibidem*.

The second constriction that Japan faced in the SPT, is the “soft power dilemma” which is facing in the regional environment. The definition of soft-power in this context goes beyond the theorization of Joseph Nye, as, unlike conceived by Nye, soft power can be used not only in a cooptive acceptance, yet in a constructive one. Japan, as a declining power, needed to show to its allies and neighboring states that it was able to reverse this trend without recurring to hard power. Soft power can be used in active and positive trends: “located on the passive side of attractiveness are soft power to improve the external security environment by conveying the peaceful and attractive images of a country, and soft power to maintain unity of a community or community of countries by creating attractiveness of the unit such as the nation-state or a regional community. On the active side are soft power to mobilize other countries’ support for one’s foreign and security policies by making the policies look attractive and legitimate; soft power to increase the approval ratings of a leader or domestic support of a government by projecting the attractiveness of a country to a domestic audience; and soft power to manipulate other countries’ way of thinking and preferences by projecting attractive ideas, values, and norms”²⁰⁴. From a perspective of interaction of soft power categories on a domestic and international level, some categories often operate synergistically, while others enter in conflict, generating a soft power dilemma, as in the case of Japan. In particular, Japan failed to harmonize the domestic approval of its leadership and, at the same time, increase its reputation with other countries, especially with North Korea, because of the well-known abduction issue. In fact, Japan initially made bold moves with the DPRK, getting closer to the normalization of relations, thanks to the efforts of PM Junichiro Koizumi and the deputy minister of foreign affairs Tanaka Hitoshi. The Japanese approach, so-called “confession diplomacy”, induced North Korea to acknowledge the abduction of Japanese citizens and, eventually, allowed the survivors to return to Japan. However, the fact that only five out of thirteen survived, and that the remains of Yokoda Megumi were fake as proved by a DNA test, caused

²⁰⁴ Geun Lee, “The Clash Of Soft Powers Between China And Japan : Synergy And Dilemmas At The Six-Party Talks”, Lynne Rienner Publishers Stable, 2018, 113–39.

the reaction of the public opinion. “The confession diplomacy caused Koizumi's North Korea policy, initially led by doves such as Fukuda Yasuo, Tanaka Hitoshi, and Hiramatsu Kenji, to backfire. Japan's North Korea policy soon turned hawkish, reflecting an increasingly "conservative" domestic political environment. [...] Within this context, Japan's approach, particularly during the later rounds when Koizumi retreated from Japan's formerly flexible North Korea policy, was the application of the fifth category of soft power, namely domestic popularity enhancing power by utilizing international events”²⁰⁵. This led to a marginalization of Japan in the table of negotiations, especially during the last rounds of the SPT.

In the light of this considerations, there was little that Russia and Japan could do to implement a cooperative approach and improving their bilateral relations. A Russian diplomat, in a conversation with a South Korean one, said that “Japan’s role in the SPT is next to nothing”²⁰⁶ and Lavrov had to remark that “Russia was opposed to any linkage between the resolution of the nuclear problem and other issues”²⁰⁷. The Russians, especially, were concerned that an issue of relevance for their national security could being decided bilaterally by the U.S. and affected by the requests of the Japanese side concerning the abduction issue, leaving Russia without any room of space. For these reasons, Russians started to doubt that the Six Party Talks would result effective for the full denuclearization of the Peninsula, even though their Foreign ministry promoted the effort. However, Russia didn’t trust American intentions to normalize relations with the North, instead they claimed that Washington required a regional threat to justify the deployment of the US army in the region, while providing military security to Japan, and thus, ensuring its loyalty. Thus, “while the Foreign ministry stressed the importance of offering incentives to the North to cooperate in the context of the Six Party Talks, behind this formal position Russians tended to be skeptical. Russia’s realists doubted that the North would ever abandon its nuclear weapons program because the benefits of being a

²⁰⁵ Geun Lee, 2018, *ibidem*.

²⁰⁶ Geun Lee, 2018, *ibidem*. “”

²⁰⁷ Leszek Buszynski, “Russia and North Korea: Dilemmas and Interests”, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 49, No. 5 (September/October 2009), pp. 809-830, University of California Press.

nuclear power would be far greater than those that could be obtained by negotiating it away”²⁰⁸, as would be proved almost a decade later during the Trump administration.

Eventually, the SPT failed to prevent the DPRK to continue its nuclear program, but this was a shared failure of all the parties involved, and in particular, was a failure for Russia and Japan to demonstrate that they are able to cooperate for the achievement of same objectives, as their national interests were not conflicting, and considering that both “recognize that their participation in the six-party talks establishes their importance to the peace and stability of Northeast Asia beyond the nuclear crisis”²⁰⁹.

²⁰⁸ *Supra*.

²⁰⁹ Tsuneo Akaha, “Japanese Policy toward the North Korean Problem - Balancing Bilateralism and Multilateralism”, in *Journal of Asian and African studies*, June 2007, Sage Publication.

Conclusions

In this research has been proved how Russia and Japan, among the many differences, share also some common traits. The most relevant is the duality of their identity: both are suspended between Europe, culturally, and Asia, physically. This influenced the evolution of their relations with the rest of the world, especially with the West, always referred as the basis of comparison, although both Japan and Russia tried to find their own way of development. And it is the Asian continent the arena in which Russia and Japan can cooperate, politically, militarily and economically.

The dual approach of analysis involved the use of the Identity theory of the constructivist paradigm to highlight how Russia and Japan shaped their own European-Asian identity over time, and how Russia was fundamental in the process for Japan, although, vice-versa, Japan itself didn't play a relevant role for Russia. The second paradigm, the realist one, explained the behavior of the Russian leadership and the reasons of its foreign policy strategy. At the same time, Japan presents traits of its long-term policy deeply rooted in the realism paradigm, as the Constitutional reform of article 9, that would allow it to deploy a proper national army. This is symptomatic of the realist environment that challenges Japan in Asia.

The Asian-Pacific Region is one of the most dynamic in terms of economics, demography and political process, with new regional powers trying to affirm their new status and old ones willingly to maintain the *status quo*. In this context, has been proved in this research that Moscow and Tokyo have a lot to gain with a win-win approach, especially considering that the national interests of both countries do not collide. Taking into account the most influential regional actors (i.e. India, South Korea and China) which have relevant bilateral ties with both Russia and Japan, it is evident that the two countries could boost the regional cooperation involving the aforementioned states, in a way or another.

India, for instance, has good relations with Russia, thanks to the heritage of the Soviet Union, which supported the independence movements and regional multilateralism, in the attempt of expanding its sphere of influence. Japan too shares

mutual trust and respect with India, thanks to the common Buddhist background. Moreover, India has the possibilities to substitute China in the future as an economic giant, and for this reason Japan already consolidates the economic relations with it.

In many aspects, the contrast of China is one of the leitmotifs that could enhance cooperation and coordination in the region, as no one of the major actors wants to see China becoming a regional hegemonic power. Neither Russia, whose policy is based on the support of multipolarism, doesn't want China to become the only ally in the region. The diversification of partners in a logic of balancing, thus, is one of the reasons that could bring Japan and Russia closer, and this explains the paradox of two countries enjoying good relations even in absence of a peace treaty. The two main vectors of the political trends in Asia are the contrast to China and the economic integration of the different partners, which at the same time is the mean to encircle China and prevent it to be the dominant power in the region.

Concerning the bilateral relations of Russia and Japan, the main obstacle to a proper political cooperation between the two countries is the unsolved territorial dispute of the Kuril Islands. The dispute originated at the time of WWII, when the Red Army invaded the little archipelago north of Hokkaido, few days after Japan capitulated and surrendered. However, the Soviet Union and Japan didn't manage to find a solution to the territorial issue because of a series of systemic and conjectural factors: because of the new balance and world order that was configured at the San Francisco Peace Conference, the Soviet Union refused to sign the peace treaty to oppose the American-British project. Nevertheless, in the Conference it was not specified that the South Kurils belonged to the Soviet Union, thus Japan used this loophole caused by the circumstances to enforce its claim. The dialogue between the USSR and Japan was interrupted by the systemic mechanisms of the Cold War until 1985, when a change of the Soviet leadership and an opening of the regime allowed the Western countries, Japan included, to establish more solid relations with Moscow. However, by the time Japan failed to solve the issue because of conjectural factors, as the different interpretation of the historical circumstances and the inadequateness of Japanese diplomacy to deal with the Soviet Union. In fact, Japan

refused to recognize the Kuril Islands as Russian, and this caused the counterpart to be skeptical about the outcome of the negotiations, closing the dialogue. Moreover, Japan proved to be unable to unpack the issues that could be dealt during negotiations and official meetings, presenting its requests altogether, causing the irritation of the Soviet Union, instead of adopting a more cautious approach. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the systemic conditions changed, opening for new opportunities to solve the dispute. However, until 2012 the dialogue was characterized by ups and downs. Only when Vladimir Putin consolidated his power in the elections, and in the same year Shinzo Abe was elected Prime Minister, the dialogue stabilized. The main factors of stability can be traced in the centralization of personal power undergone by Shinzo Abe, who became one of the longest-serving PM of Japan. This was an insurance for Putin in the context of mutual trust-building and compliance of the deals. In fact, the two leaders, during their twenty-one official meetings, established a personal relation that allowed Japan and Russia to find a common ground for the resolution of the issue culminating with the establishment of a joint economic plan in 2016, despite the international isolation of Russia caused by the Crimean annexation. In fact, the main problem of Russo-Japanese relations is the lack of mutual trust, that could be bridged through the enhancement of economic cooperation.

However, there is another constant factor influencing the relations between the two countries that cannot be ignored for its relevance and implications for the security architecture of the region: the special relation between Japan and the US. Since its occupation after its defeat in WWII, Japan was not allowed to establish a proper national army and the security was provided by Washington and Japanese pacifism was enshrined in article 9 of the Constitution. However, the Korean war and the tensions arose in the continent after the war required Japan to reinterpret the Constitution and established the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), a proper army that was not allowed to be deployed out of national borders. Despite after the end of the bipolar order the SDF have been used abroad for peacekeeping operations, in line with the international rights. Nevertheless, the constitutional reform that would

abolish article 9 is still one of the top topic on the political agenda of Shinzo Abe, especially at the light of the Asian context, with China on the rise and North Korea having completed the nuclear program, and the unpredictability of the Trump administration.

Indeed, considering the turbulent relation between Russia and the US, and the special one between Japan and the US, it is logical that the latter would have repercussions also on the dialogue of Japan with Russia. In terms of foreign policy strategy, Russia supports multipolarism and the division of the world in subsystem, as it would allow Moscow to extend its influence in different geographical areas and regain its status of power, recovered from the shock of the fall of the Soviet Union. However, the US, in the transitional period after 1991, tried to shape an American-centered unipolar world balance, that miserably failed. Thus, despite the multipolar order was established by the new trends, the US still tries to reaffirm itself on the global stage as the only hegemonic power. For this reason, Russia, with its active proactive foreign policy, represents an obstacle to the US plans. In relation with Japan, Russia is concerned by the fact that, without an independent approach to its own security, Japan will always operate in respect to Washington limiting itself to take resolute decisions in terms of multilateral cooperation. On the contrary, the US persists defending its own interests, as the recent developments on the North Korean Peninsula and the commercial war initiated by the Trump administration proves. On the other hand, the closeness of Japan to the US could be used in favor of Russia, which could use Tokyo as an interlocutor with Washington, using the pressing on the Kuril Islands as a diplomatic tool.

Nevertheless, as proved by the case study of two countries' approach to the North Korean issue, Russia and Japan have still a lot of work to do in order to improve the mutual trust and the bilateral relations, and they have to adopt a common strategy which gives the right relevance on the partner if they really want to enhance economic and, in the future, political cooperation and play a leading role in North-East Asia and the Asian-Pacific Region. Without reciprocal coordination, both states are doomed to follow the dominance of China and the US in the area. This is the

very first limit of the relations between Russia and Japan. The other limit is the inconclusive approach of Japanese diplomacy to the disputed territories and security issues, as proved by the negotiations held with the Soviet Union and, later, in the Six-Party Talks framework. Thus, Japan has to offer more incentives to Russia and, on the other hand, prove that it is not totally dependent on Washington, if it wants to achieve a deal with Russia. Indeed, many improvements have been made in recent years, yet they are not sufficient. A bold step forward must be done, by either one of the parties involved, or both.

Lastly, Russia must be reintegrated into the international community, or every effort made by Japan risks to be ineffective in the long-term. Japan itself could play a decisive role in this, but without a change of Western mind-set, that always perceived Russia as a threat, influencing the policy-making and decision-taking process, and Russia proving the West wrong about itself, the dream of a common free-trade area “from Lisbon to Vladivostok”, that would eventually include Japan, will remain a utopia.

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Lectures

- “Экономика Китая: Возможные Сценарии Развития И Стратегии Для России (China's economy: possible scenarios of development and strategy for Russia), held on January 13, 2016 at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_FC2swBKhY - last access on 28.03.2018).
- John Mearsheimer, “*The causes and consequences of the Ukrainian Crisis*”, Lecture of October 21, 2016 at MGIMO, Moscow.

Annex – Interview with Professor Dmitry Streltsov

Candidate: Good evening Professor Streltsov, may I ask you to introduce yourself so that we can understand the point of view of our interview? In the sens of your knowledge on the topic and how you can help me in this work.

Interviewed: I'm Dmitri Streltsov head of the Asian department of MGIMO University.

C: I know that you are an expert of Japanese-Russian relations, you also speak a good level of Japanese. I know that you have translated from Japanese many documents. I'm really glad for this opportunity. My thesis is about the contemporary Russian-Japanese relations and how this can influence the balance of force in the Pacific region and what are the future perspective for these relations. We know that Japan and Russia are formally still in war, there is no peace treaty because of the territorial dispute over the Kuril Islands, and I would like to ask you: what are the real causes that prevent Russia and Japan to sign a peace treaty? Is there only a matter of honor or there are some hidden interests beyond this?

I: Well you're asking several questions that are different because of their nature. First of all, if you speak about the significance of Russo-Japanese relations and the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific, I would say that among other great powers in interrelations between Russia and Japan, the United-States and China, the relations between Russia and Japan are, so to say, the weak chain, the weak point or the weak part of these relations. You know that historically Russian and Japan didn't communicate with each other for the historical past these relations between Russia and Japan are the most, so to say, young and the most fragile. Russia and Japan don't have very vast experience on building constructive relations. Moreover, the period of the XX century is the period of rather hostile relations or maybe relations of coolness and estrangement. There are three periods when Russia and Japan were

more or less neutral to each other, not friendly, but neutral, but these three periods were very short. I mean the period after the Russo-Japanese war (1905 until 1917), that was perhaps the best period, the honeymoon of Russo-Japanese relations in the XX century. Another one was after the Neutrality Pact was signed between the Soviet Union and Japan in 1941, until World War II, we were geopolitically adversary but nevertheless didn't have hostilities or didn't wage war towards each other. And the third period was after signing the 1956 Declaration, there were some agreement on signing a peace treaty but it wasn't fulfilled due to the decision of Japanese government which signed a new security treaty with the United-States. The new spiral of the Cold War led Moscow to put forward new conditions for fulfilling this declaration so that the declaration wasn't fulfilled, you know that.

So, speaking of today's Russo-Japanese relations I would say that geopolitically our countries of course are on the opposite sides of Americans. We are quite geopolitical adversaries because Russia is known, so to say, waging and according to some experts in a new Cold War against the United-States and tends relations and Japan is security treaty partner of the United-States. Therefore, Russian military doctrine exists on the prerequisite that it could be some sort of possible hostilities against the United-States and Japan, which has American military basis on its territory. In this it's an adversary for Russia. This is one thing and therefore Russia sees for example some military construction or some efforts in the military fields in direction against the North Korean military threat like this new ABM system in Japan as undermining the strategic balance and breaking the existing treaties like with the intermediate missiles system. So, Russia considers these acts as leading to new conflict. This is one thing, but another thing that for Russia, from the point of view of Russia's interests, in the wake of rising China and the growth, the military growth, of China, it is in Russia's interest to have many partners, not one partner but many partners and to diversify its export and export partners like Japan, South Korea or other partners in Asia. Of course, this gives Russia space for maneuver.

Therefore, besides that Russia is interested in Japanese investments and technologies, within the background the development of its Far East region and unlike global context of Russo-Japanese relations in which these relations are very hostile, in the regional context Russia has a lot of interests, substantial interest in developing good relations with Japan. But from the point of view of Japan, Russia is also, so to say, a balancing power, balancer in its strategy because Japan fears the cost and the results of military cooperation between Russia and China. Russia doesn't want China to be too strong in the military terms due to Russia's technological and military cooperation. Of course, for Japan, Russia gives more confidence, trust. Good relations with Russia in terms of its regional strategy which aimed at the containment of China and to some extent not containing but waging a more balanced policy towards Asia. This is I think the main motivation.

But speaking about the second question, why the Peace Treaty hasn't been signed yet, I would say that for Russia, frankly speaking, peace treaty as a sort of document summing up the results of WWII, is not significant, is not acute, of acute importance. Russia has nothing in terms of unsettled questions, unsettled items of WWII with Japan. All these problems have been resolved in the framework of 1956 Declaration except for this delimitation problem. But about the delimitation problem my personal point view is that it has very slim perspective for Russia to solve, for Japan to solve. Japan will never agree to abandoned its claims on four islands and Russia will not go beyond the condition on the 1956 Declaration according to which it exchange two islands to Japan. Therefore these mismatching positions couldn't be overcome. This gap couldn't be filled. My view is that speaking about peace treaty, Russia thinks that peace treaty is not a problem of delimitation but a problem of signing a sort of cooperation treaty like to one existing between China and Japan. But for Japan the understanding of this treaty is that it should solve the territorial problem. That's why there are mismatching positions, this gap between positions because of the very essence, the very substance of peace treaty.

C: Thank you. You first mentioned the Aegis Ashore Ballistic Missiles Interception System that Japan bought from the USA. During the last diplomatic visit of Mr. Lavrov in Japan last week, he said that “with full respect for Japan’s right to choose the way it protects its territory, we proceed from the premise that any action of any country should be based on the rule of security indivisibility. No one must ensure their security by infringing on the security of others”. According to these words, it seems likely that Russia perceives as a threat the eventually revision of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution?

I: No I don’t think so because Russia doesn’t criticize Japan. I never heard that Russia criticized Japan for its security policy. Unlike China that criticizes it, Russia is very self-constrained at least on the official level.

C: Regarding the domestic political debate, how can it influence the direction of Japanese foreign policy? Especially towards Russia?

I: You mean the domestic debate about the Constitution?

C: I mean about the Constitution, pacifism or even if adopting a pro-USA or a more independent policy.

I: Well, generally speaking about public sentiment and Japan, of course public sentiment is not benevolent towards Russia, there is a negative view of Russia generally speaking. Therefore, public policy is the hostage of public sentiment in this respect, politicians cannot ignore this, so to say, negative feelings towards Russia and besides most Japanese are confident that Russia grant Japan on its territory. It could be changed in this context. But as for general view, as far as Russia is concerned, I would say that Japan is much more obsessed with general democratic values or some for example situation in Europe, the Ukrainian problem because it too far from Japan. Besides, Japanese are, so to say, idealists in terms of democracy.

Therefore I think that in this respect Russia, if we leave aside the territorial problem, Japan has very pragmatic approach. In some cases, cooperation with Russia is very beneficial for Japan, in some cases it is not. Cases when such cooperation is beneficial, for example coordinating policy towards North Korea or perhaps some specific cases of maritime security or like maybe war against terrorism, cybersecurity... There are some issues where countries cooperate with each other.

C: In my thesis I use two different patterns to explain the behavior of Russia and Japan in the international arena. While Russia is more a realist actor, Japan fits better with the identity theory of the constructivist approach. In this case, how much the personal leadership of Shinzo Abe can represent a contact point for Russia and Japan. Because after all it seems that the only way to deal with Russia, at least from the Japanese point of view, it seems that the only way to deal with Russia is to show off strength, as Shintaro Abe (Shinzo Abe's father) did, making an extra effort to leave his hospital bed to meet visiting president Mikhail Gorbachev. Paper-thin due to pancreatic cancer, Shintaro Abe wore coats and underwear that his wife, Yoko Abe, had padded to make him look less frail. So is personal strength a characteristic that Russian leaders appreciate?

I: Well for us, for our mentality of course the personality of the leader is important. Leaders so to say outwork what is like his appearance, or his manners or his perhaps level of his support are very important. Therefore, from this point of view, everybody say that Mr. Abe and Mr. Putin have very good chemistry of personal relations. For Mr. Abe, Mr. Putin is maybe the person with whom it's easy to deal because Putin is, perhaps in Mr. Abe's views, a person who could solve the problems very properly and effectively having the level of his personal capabilities or resources that be used to solve these problems. Perhaps he hopes that Mr. Putin extend Japan four islands only by Putin's personal will. Therefore, both leaders are quite so to say forward looking to each other.

C: Regarding the US-Japanese relations it seems that now, after the Trump administration, we are at a turning point considering even the last developments regarding the fact that Japan now is the largest American ally to be left off a list of countries temporarily exempted from stiff tariffs on steel and aluminum imports. So how much really the USA values Japan and how could this influence Japan-Russia relations?

I: Well for the USA I think that Japanese-Russian relations also have global and regional context. Global context because Japan is member of G7 and therefore it should adopt sanctions and restricted acts against Russia. But regional context that Russo-Japanese relations could have a bouncing effect on regional situation because most countries could cooperate with each other in terms of so to say creating an alternative to Chinese hegemony. Both are not very happy about Chinese hegemony. Of course, Japan is more unhappy but Russia is also not very happy about the dominance of China. The difference between Russia and the United-States in its approach to regional order is that the United-States doesn't want the US-led dominance in the region to be substituted by a China-led dominance in the region. So the United-States want US-centered security system somehow to be conserved, to be reserved, to be detained. But compare to that Russia stresses for a multi-centric world not dominated by any power. Therefore, Russia would not be very happy with Chinese dominance. Of course, the US don't want some other country dominance.

this respect, well, I think that general attitude towards China from the United-States and Russia today differ. But in terms of some concrete problems or issues on regional agenda, Russia and Japan could cooperate with each other and in the eyes of the United-States, such cooperation could be fruitful and constructive and also meet the US national interest.

C: Then, why Trump is not giving too much importance to Japan even considering the North Korean deal? In the sense, North Korea and South Korea now will be present at the table of negotiations with the US and neither Japan nor Russia have been called for being part of it.

I: Well my view is that this is the result of North Korean policy. North Korea wants to deal only with the United-States and not with the 6-parties talks format, and tried to strike a deal with the United-States several times until now. Therefore, the participation of Japan and Russia is not welcomed maybe by North Korean itself which prefers to deal with the United-States directly. This is one answer of your questions.

Another thing is that the United-States themselves still want to play the leading role in the region and not to consult, not to coordinate its actions with other partners. Therefore, Russia is the political adversary and not welcome for the United-States. As for Japan, there is also the problem of abduction, the Japanese who were abducted because Japan tries to raise this problem and it maybe also irritated the United-States because it has nothing to do with the nuclear issue.

C: Last question, about North Korea, can we say that Russia and Japan in their approach to the North Korean issues could cooperate even not directly but indirectly to solve the nuclear crisis in the region?

I: Yes, they could. You know that during Mr. Lavrov's visit to Japan last week, both sides agreed to organize some meeting of representatives of both countries on suspected tools. So cooperation is possible and as far as I know there is an exchange of views on this problem. But how could they cooperate? Well, my view is that at present stage, nothing more than just an exchange of views, or informing each other. But what could be some fruitful cooperation look like? Like coordination of efforts. Well I don't think that Japan will take any effort without consulting the United-States. I'm very skeptical about such possibility.

Abstract

Japan is characterized by the unicity and peculiarity of a culture that developed by its own. These elements, which accompanied Japanese society and culture throughout centuries until nowadays, can be find in its history and politics, as it always distinguished itself from neighboring countries such as China and Korea. After over two centuries of *Sakoku*, the isolationist foreign policy of the Tokugawa Shogunate (1600-1868) which consolidated Japanese singularity, Japan opened itself to world politics. The defeat in WWII and the special relation it established with the United States, in terms of dependence on security, enhanced its singular status of world power.

Under the US wing during the period of the Cold War, Japan managed to become the second-largest economy by GDP (now third), the fourth-largest by PPP and the fourth-largest world importer and exporter. Along economic achievements, Japan also fully integrated into the international arena. It is also considered to be an advanced democracy, and usually is grouped with Western Powers, despite being an Asian country. In all these facts, the element of peculiarity persists due to the historical circumstances that Japan passed through.

Modern-day Japan's foreign policy, however, has been deeply influenced and shocked by two events that occurred after the end of the Cold War, when the world order was shifting from a bipolar to a multipolar one: The Gulf War in 1991 and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. These two events represent a turning point for Japanese foreign policy, that can be explained through the Identity theory of the Constructivism paradigm, which focuses on the impact of national identity and culture on both foreign and domestic policies. It rejects the idea that state interests are determined by the structure of the international system, and instead postulates that they are socially constructed and vary between states. Identities come before interests, and state identity emerges from interaction in different social environments, both domestic and international. The main driver of a country's foreign policy is the relations that the individual has towards the other. Thus, it can be translated on the level of international relations considering the imagine that the

self-consciousness state has of itself and how it is perceived by the other states or International Organizations through its Foreign Policy, the instrument it possesses to interact with the other actors of the international arena.

During Gulf war and the Us Iraq invasion, Japan drastically changed its foreign policy approach due to the blame addressed by the Western coalition to Japan, because of its scarce support and political inertia. In fact, at the time of the Kuwait invasion, Japan failed to meet the expectative of its allies providing only financial support instead of a military concrete action, damaging the perception that they had over it and bringing identity crisis both in the public opinion and for the decision makers, the 2003 Iraqi invasion proved to be a perfect chance for Japan to reaffirm its alignment to Wester neoliberal states and coalition.

However, Japan moves into a realist context and tries to conciliate the needed pragmatism with its idealism. In fact, in the Asia-Pacific subsystem the states increase each year their military expenditure. Moreover, in Asia, the proliferation of nuclear weapons involves five countries and generally all countries face scarce democracy index, that, according to the theory of democratic peace, poses an element of uncertainty and unpredictability to Japan. The result is an “hybrid model of Japanese leadership”, which imposes an agent-centered understanding of Japanese leadership in relation to its foreign policy and diplomacy. In fact, Abe focused its policy agenda on the containment of China’s raising status and power. The dichotomy of Sino-Japanese relations is the main driver of foreign policy decisions in the East Asia. However, Japanese diplomatic relations are highly influenced by nationalistic fears, unsolved issues, grudge and territorial disputes appointed by neighboring states. The analysis of the three main actors in Asia will explain the situation:

For instance, the Republic of Korea (ROK) is a key element for Japanese strategy for two reason: the first is due the relevance of South Korea in terms of economics and soft power in the plan of encirclement and balancing of China.

Regarding China, Japanese relations with Beijing have recently improved, despite they faced a deterioration since 2010 due to the Senkaku Island dispute,

which threatens the sovereignty of Japan, China and Taiwan, which claims their rights over a little archipelago situated in the East China Sea. However, as Japan cannot operate on a direct military manner, it shifted the competition with China on the economic plan, in an ambitious chase, trying to nullify the Chinese moves aimed to expand its influence, as the One Belt One Road development project.

In this perspective, Japan regards India as another valuable regional ally. India and Japan historically have always had good diplomatic relation, also because of the common Buddhist cultural heritage. The greatest countermove presented by Japan and India to contrast China and its One Belt One Road development project is the Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), emerged in the joint declaration issued by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in November 2016.

After its defeat in WWII, according to the identity theory, Japan used Russia as a negative model (the “other”) from which differentiate and sublimate its own virtues (the “self”). Nevertheless, the attempt to normalize the bilateral relations during Brezhnev’s leadership in the early ‘70s and initiated by the URSS itself did not involve the reconfiguration of Russian “otherness”. Only during the years of Gorbachev reform the perception of Japan toward Russian was changing. When, six months after the visit of Gorbachev, the Soviet Union collapsed, Japan saw it as the latest proof of its status of mature representative of the values of democracy, rule of law, freedom and the efficiency of market economy principles, reaffirming its political identity. The support by Japan for the admittance of Russia to the G7 and to the APEC during the Vancouver Summit in 1997 are other examples of Japan’s change toward Russia.

As for Russia, the key element for the understating of its recent approach to foreign policy lies in the recent history of the country, having the collapse of the Soviet Union, defined by President Vladimir Putin as a “major geopolitical disaster of the century”. After having been a world superpower, the Russian Federation, acknowledged as the direct heir of Soviet legacy by international law, Russia passed the last years of the ‘90s recovering from the economic depression and the cultural shock of its downgrade on the international sphere. For this reason, as soon as the

new multipolar world order was taking shape, and after the slow recovery was ongoing, Russia promptly raised as defender of multipolarism, in the hope of occupying a relevant position in its own sub-system and regaining the lost prestige on an international level. The early 2000s are marked by the broken hopes of Russia regarding a closer cooperation with the European Union and the West in general, earlier promoted by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrey Kozyrev (1990-1996), which eventually failed as proved by the NATO intervention in Kosovo (1999) and the Ukrainian crisis. The ultimate result was a further estrangement from Europe and the US, opening, on the other hand, a new window of opportunity to Eurasian integration and the Far East.

Another important element that must be stressed, is the cultural identification of Russia itself: Russia is, in its uniqueness, a Eurasian state, and this influences its foreign policy, its national interests' priorities and security perceptions, as Japan. However, while Japan behavior traditionally was explained through the lenses of the Identity theory of the Constructivism school, Russia still acts on the international plane as a pure Realist actor. Moreover, there is an historical fundamental bias in the conceptualization of Russian Foreign Policy: its geographical vulnerability. Russia always had much more borders to control and where an invasion can come from. Especially relevant is the fact that Moscow is located deep into the Eastern European plain, with no natural defenses: this increased the sense of vulnerability of Russian leaders for centuries, at the point that Russian Foreign Policy has been characterized in the past by territorial expansion and establishment of buffer states between its borders and other powerful Countries. The same reason pushed the Tsars in conquering the remote areas of Northern Asia and, nowadays, NATO's enlargement is perceived as a threat.

For this reason, Russia now is trying to improve the diplomatic, economic and military ties with its Asian neighbors. Moreover, Russia acknowledges the new systemic distribution of power worldwide and sees itself as a regional major actor and doesn't want to lose this regained status.

Indeed, Russia's development of its own interests in Asia is not a recent trend: already in Soviet times, the Central Committee established relations with several Asian countries, especially supporting the development of national-independence movements and financing infrastructure of the new-born nations in a bipolar perspective, seeking allies to oppose the West. Even the investments and the growth of the Asian part of Russia were motivated by military objectives and a sort of shortsightedness. Only after the systemic change it became clear to the Russian leadership that the Soviet strategy in the Asia-Pacific region was a failure. For this reason, the newborn Russia conceptualized a strategic triangle between Russia, China and India to oppose the American unilateralism in world politics, which eventually would evolve in the BRICS.

In Asia, India remains of Russia's favorite partners not only for the fact that it is one of the most predictable candidate to become a center of global influence, but also because India in the last decades developed and achieved a valuable specialization in the sphere of high-technologies. On the other hand, as there are physical impediments for Russia to develop its economy, the solution would be the implementation of a post-industrial paradigm of growth. It is evident that Russia and India have complementary economic problems which can overtake through a reciprocal cooperation.

Regarding China, despite Moscow and Beijing nowadays defines themselves as "strategic partners" since the signature of the 1996 treaty of Strategic Partnership, that eventually developed in 2001 into a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, the relations of the two countries haven't always been on high level, especially at the time of the Soviet Union. In fact, the different ideological interpretations of Marxism caused the Sino-Soviet split in 1969, which culminated into the border conflict between the two countries. Russia started to pay more attention in the formulation of its foreign policy to China when it recognized in China a new possible pole of regional power, endeavoring for a closer military and economic cooperation. In fact, the Russian approach to Chinese investment has changed, permitting economic cooperation in areas once limited to Russia only.

However, despite the friendly declarations and high-level diplomatic relations, Russia is looking at China with a certain suspect: China turned to be more influent than expected both on military and economic terms, overtaking Russian economy. The trend of military exercitations and naval drills enacted by China and Russia seems to confirm this scenario, and now Russia tries to diversify its regional partners, as South Korea.

Already at the beginning of the '90s Russia revised its priorities in North-East Asia and launched a policy of good neighborhood in the Far East, looking for the development of multilateral cooperation with South Korea. The speech of Mikhail Gorbachev delivered in Krasnoyarsk in September 1986 highlighted the improvement of the relations with South Korea, bur only with the beginning of the "Putin Era", the relations entered in a new phase characterized by a deepening of economic cooperation and political dialogue in the context of the development of a mechanism of regional security and normalization in the Northern-East Asia. Russia now is pressing South Korea to take part to the Trans-Asiatic transit road, which is supposed to serve as an extension of the Trans-Siberian railway, crossing the Korean Peninsula and reaching the port of Busan.

Regarding Japan, Russia and Japan share a common psychological trait, consisting in the double identity of their culture, divided between Asia and the West. Nevertheless, the role of Japan in the identity-construction process for Russia was marginal. To explain the double identity of Russia, we can use the same Identity theory applied for Japan. For Russia, the identity-shaping process developed at the same pace with the establishment of conditions for its own national security. Russia forged its dual, intercontinental identity throughout its secular history in six phases, closely related to the change of leadership in a lapse of time unfolding from the Rus of Moscow at the beginning, passing through the Imperial and Soviet Russia, until the current Russian Federation.

Historically, the contacts of Russia with Japan were limited in the centuries, and only in the last century the two countries engaged war against each other. Therefore, Russia did not construct its identity using Japan, depicting it as "the

other”. A contraposition role for Japan emerged in Russian mentality only in Soviet Times. However, once the Soviet Union collapsed, and Russia opened to Europe and the West, also these preconceptions were erased. For this reason, Russian approach to Japan is more pragmatic than expected.

This means that, as Japan does not pose a threat or an obstacle to the national interest of Russia, as proved, the two countries could cooperate in the multipolar world which is affirming itself on the global scenario, especially in Asia. However, the territorial dispute concerning the Kuril Islands is still a hot topic in the bilateral diplomatic ties between the two countries. Nevertheless, the absence of a Peace Treaty is considered to be mostly a formal impediment from Russia, and this allowed the development of diplomatic, economic and cultural ties, which could be deepened once the unredeemed land issue will be resolved.

In the history Russo-Japanese relations, the situation between the two countries exacerbated particularly after WWII, when the unclear dynamics of occupation of the South Kuril Islands prevented Japan and Russia to find an agreement and signing a peace treaty. Indeed, the origins and the inability to resolve the dispute are due to systemic conditions, as generated by a war (which is always synonym of systematic change) and perpetuated by the bipolar order established at the time of the Cold War, as Japan became strategically fundamental for the safeguard of American interests in the Pacific, being the operative base for the US army.

Regarding the territorial dispute, as the article 2 of the Peace Treaty didn't explicitly mention that the Kuril Islands would have been returned to Russia and Japan used this fact as a loophole to justify its territorial claims. Moreover, the promise of the two countries to solve the dispute were blocked in a deadlock by the mechanism of the Cold War, as the tensions between the Soviet Union and the US were increasing. Thus, the two countries tried again to find a solution and a rapprochement only in the last phase of the Cold War. However, the failures are due more to the diplomacy and the incapability to converge the position of Japan and Russia to a meeting point. The causes, thus, are agent-centered, rather than

structural. Indeed, the agents moved in the systemic framework and were subjected to its pressures.

The Soviet Union, and Russia later, have always been steady in its position, asking Japan to acknowledge the Kuril Islands as Soviet Union's spoils of war. Once Japan would admit it, then the Russian counterpart would be more willingly to find a compromise good for Japan as well. However, Japan always refused to give ground, and the negotiations were stuck in a deadlock for years. Japan main error during negotiations, thus, was insisting in presenting always the territorial issue at once during other meetings or agreements, incapable to adopt a step-by-step approach, irritating Moscow. According to Kazuhiko Togo, a former Japanese diplomat, since 1985, Japan had five opportunities to solve the territorial dispute with Moscow. However, they all failed because of domestic political dynamics in both countries or a wrong diplomatic approach, not only because of systemic conditions.

Nevertheless, 2012 could be considered as a watershed year for the negotiations between Russia and Japan, as the reelection of Abe in the same year of Putin's election introduced an element of discontinuity with Japanese political tradition, which was characterized by short-life governments. Shinzo Abe managed to revert the trend, consolidating his leadership and inaugurating a hybrid model of diplomacy. Abe's premiership positively impacted the negotiations: in fact, Russian leadership prefers to deal with stable and strong partners, for the same political bias that dominates the domestic politics. After a two-year break caused by the Ukrainian crisis, from 2016 Japanese-Russian relations entered in a "golden era". In April 2017, Putin and Abe met in Moscow, and the outcome of the talks reflected the positive developments of Russo-Japanese relations, based on two factors: the personal relationship of the two leaders and the fact that, despite the introduction of sanctions by Japan, Tokyo adopted "soft" sanctions that did not affected Russia so much. In fact, the Russians acknowledged that Japan, as member of an alliance, had duties to respect towards its allies and it could not recede from them. However, experts condemn the prolonged absence of a real developing strategy or vision of

the bilateral ties, both from Russian and Japanese side, that could prevent them to find a definitive solution. A “new” Russia and an “old” Japan have, so far, failed to realize their significant potential and embark on a trustful partnership, albeit the objective of achieving a constructive partnership has been set out in official documents.

The paradox in the relations consists in the fact that Russia and Japan, despite the absence of a peace treaty, developed economic and political ties and they periodically hold inter-ministerial meeting. This means that the both adopted a more pragmatic approach and recognized the strategic importance of the counterpart, making the peace treaty irrelevant for cooperation.

However, the Kuril Island dispute is still a hot topic and the difficulty in reaching a solution is determined especially by the different relevance Japan and Russia give to them. For Japan, the restitution of the islands is a priority, and a matter of honor. For this reason, Japan is unlikely to give up the claim, also for a matter of international prestige. For Russia the question is different. The islands do not represent an historical propriety, nor an economic revenue, as it would benefit from a more intensive trade with Japan once given the islands back, rather than exploiting their natural resources. As a matter of principle, Russia wants international law to be observed, and that Japan acknowledges the islands as propriety of Russia. But it does not mean that Moscow could not accept Tokyo’s requests. Russia knows it, and is the one which leads the game, waiting for a better proposal from the Japanese side. Japan, considering the relevance of its economy, could boost economic relations as use them as a leverage to improve the mutual trust of the two parties and bringing them closer together.

However, the Kuril Islands, are potentially a strategic outpost for Russia’s security. Russia perceives the US military presence in Japan as a threat: Russia cannot permit that Japan, once retrieved the Islands, allows US army to establish on them a missiles defense system, which could be easily reconverted into an offensive system. In fact, Russia is not against the Japanese constitutional reform of article 9,

as an armed but independent Japan is preferable and convenient for the establishment of a multipolar balance in the region, as Russia pursues.

The North Korean issue is a case study in which the behavior and coordination of Russia and Japan toward a third actor have been analyzed. The Korean Peninsula became the field of confrontation of two opposite alliances or, better saying, “triangles”: The Continental triangle, formed by Russia, China and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK); and the Ocean triangle, composed by the US, Japan and the Republic of Korea. The fact that Japan and Russia are secondary actors concerning the Korean issue could be an advantage, giving them more room for diplomatic action.

In order to understand North Korea in the international arena, must be take into account the role of its state ideology, Juche, developed after the armistice of Panmunjom in 1953. Establishing Juche means, in a nutshell, being the master of revolution and reconstruction in one’s own country. This means holding fast to an independent position, rejecting dependence on others. Juche is composed by Chaju (Domestic and Foreign Independence), Charip (Economic Independence), Chawi (Military Independence). In general, the North Korean society presents other typical common features among the societies established by revolutionary parties, as Pol Pot’s Cambodia. This model of society is called “closed society” and it was theorized by Italian sociologist Luciano Pellicani and is composed by 8 characteristics (sacralization of tradition, isolation, autarky, hypersocialization, orthodoxy, holism, political centralization and misoneism). The latest opening of the regime could be explained by two different hypotheses: the first one, optimistically, assumes that the North Korean leadership is able to play in the international chessboard and is not blinded by its own ideology, as thought earlier. The second hypothesis emphasizes the characteristic of the regime and the closed society, making the real intention of North Korea still unclear and, thus, unpredictable.

As the Asian part of the Ring of Fire is where world politics will focus for the next decades, Japan and Russia have the possibility to extend their conception over the matter of national interests and play a major role for the conflict prevention and

economic integration in the region through cooperation. For this reason, the Korean case can be the testing ground of their ambitions and possibilities to reemerge on the Asian region, which will be proved by their approach and coordination over the Peninsula. Moreover, this provides also an example how the two states interact with each other.

Concerning the reunification of Korea, Tokyo recognizes that a unified state that could count on the technological development of the South and the rich natural resources of the North could pose a serious threat for Japanese economy, as the concurrence would be too strong. Maintaining *the status quo* would be more reasonable. On the other hand, Japan is directly threatened by the nuclear arsenal of North Korea, whose missiles could easily reach the Japanese territories. Moreover, the abduction question refrains Japan from improving the bilateral ties. Overall, the Korean Peninsula represents the possibility for Japan to prove himself to be a regional power. Indeed, the Japanese approach must be pacific, in accordance with the democratic principles enshrined in its constitution.

Japan aims at three objectives in its approach to North Korea: the first one is to regulate and nullify North Korea's dangerous foreign behaviors, rather than overturn the regime in North Korea. The second one is to gradually change the nature of North Korea's political and economic system. The third is the settlement of unfortunate past issues between Japan and North Korea, which eventually will contribute to the peace and stability in Northeast Asia, which directly influence Japan's security.

As for Russia, historically, the USSR was a privileged partner for North Korea, which received the nuclear protection of Moscow during the Cold War years. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, Russia tried to adopt an approach deprived of ideology and to reconstruct the relations with Pyeongyang according to its new principles of foreign policy when Russian Foreign Minister Evgeniy Primakov realized that it was time to stop ignoring the Russian interests in the Korean Peninsula. The restoration of the relations with North Korea on a de-ideological basis was the pragmatic mean to realize this objective. The diplomatic

talks were intensified, and the mutual state visit erased a series of longstanding preconception and theories. Nevertheless, the North Korea crisis of 2002 let Russia no choice to gradually take the distances from Pyeongyang and avoid a direct involvement with the regime. Eventually, in December 2013 Russia joined the international sanctions against North Korea, precluding further cooperation. Russia still has interests to defend in the Peninsula, especially considering that its action in resolving the Korean issue could give back political authority to Russia not only on a regional level, yet on the global stage. It is worth mentioning that Russian interests are not against the other States, and this will allow them to keep the regional balance. As stated before, Russia aims at the development and the interdependence of the market (especially the energy one) in North East Asia. To achieve this objective, its strategy consists in two vectors: the improvement of the transport infrastructure in the region and the construction of a gas pipeline who would connect Russia with South Korea, crossing the DPRK.

An attempt to resolve the North Korean crisis was the Six-Party Talks. Despite the other regional actors already envisioned the possibility of a series of multilateral summit aimed to resolve the North Korean issue, the initiative started from China. In April 2003, as Beijing was worried for an exacerbation of the regional situation, called for a trilateral meeting with the DPRK and the US, in the attempt of finding some common points on their positions. The meeting didn't bring the hoped results. Thus, a few months later, on 27-28 August 2003, thanks to the efforts of China, for the first time the representatives of the US, North Korea, South Korea, China, Russia and Japan met in the first round of the so-called Six-Party Talks (SPT). Only thanks to the position of Kim Jong-Il, and the high consideration he had about Putin matured during the years 2000-01, Russia was invited to the negotiations roundtable, where also Japan participated for the balance's sake

While the first rounds of the SPT where pervaded with optimism and good will of the participating states, resulting in the positive promulgation of the Joint Declarations, the situation started to worsening in the spring of 2006. This outcome was the result of several factors: in the first place, there was a change in the

administration of Washington, which is always marked by a decline of foreign policy activity of the US and its partners, as they don't know what to expect from the new Presidency. In the second place, the conservative party *Hannara* took power in South Korea, which changed its approach to North Korea, adopting a more resolute one. Thirdly, the SPT resulted only in the occasional implementation of the agreements reached, rather than the formulation of new ones. Moreover, in 2008 the health conditions of Kim Jong-Il worsened, and no decisive political action was taken by North Korea. Subsequently, the positions of the conservative ends of the North Korean leadership were strengthened, paving the way for a further militarization of the country. Lastly, there was not enough reciprocal trust to allow the parties to make concessions to North Korea without damaging their image on an international level and go against their own interests.

However, the SPT failed to serve as a common ground for Japanese-Russian dialogue and cooperation, and the reasons can be traced in the domestic decision making process of Japan, that prevented Tokyo to undertake a proactive position in the talks and marginalized Japan itself in the multilateral platform, despite being potentially one of the decisive actors, as it could provide a substantial economic aid for the development (and implied demilitarization) of North Korea. In fact, Japan had a little experience in the multiparty negotiations. Thus, Japan miscalculated the diplomatic mechanisms of a multilateral approach, and tried to bring to the other parties' attention particular issues that would require to be dealt with bilaterally as part of the normalization procedure of the relations between Tokyo and Pyongyang, as the abduction issue. Indeed, the Japanese insistence was criticized by the other participants, namely South Korea, China and Russia, as counterproductive and obstructionist. Particularly related to the SPT, there are three elements that prevented Japan to adopt an efficient policy. The first one is the nature of the issue discussed in the SPT. The second element deals with the composition of the actors, which significantly affects the outcome. In fact, in the SPT were involved the diplomatic representations of the parties, the families of the abductees, supported by several Japanese politicians, the media, and the world public opinion. Thirdly, the decision-

making process of the SPT privileged, and to a certain extent confined, the Japanese diplomacy to use only the economic leverage, as a mean to persuade North Korea to abandon the nuclear path. But economic aids and sanctions have their limits, as economic aid is a mostly action-less option, as it deals with future expectation and it has to wait that all parties arrive at the stage where they are ready to begin negotiations for a solid arrangement for economic packages.

The second constriction that Japan faced in the SPT, is the “soft power dilemma” which is facing in the regional environment. Japan, as a declining power, needed to show to its allies and neighboring states that it was able to reverse this trend without recurring to hard power. From a perspective of interaction of soft power categories on a domestic and international level, some categories often operate synergistically, while others enter in conflict, generating a soft power dilemma, as in the case of Japan. Especially, Japan failed to harmonize the domestic approval of its leadership and, at the same time, increase its reputation with other countries, especially with North Korea, because of the well-known abduction issue. This led to a marginalization of Japan in the table of negotiations, especially during the last rounds of the SPT.

The Russians were concerned that an issue of relevance for their national security could be decided bilaterally by the U.S. and affected by the requests of the Japanese side concerning the abduction issue, leaving Russia without any room of space. For these reasons, Russians started to doubt that the Six Party Talks would result effective for the full denuclearization of the Peninsula. Eventually, the SPT failed to prevent the DPRK to continue its nuclear program, but this was a shared failure of all the parties involved, and in particular, was a failure for Russia and Japan to demonstrate that they are able to cooperate for the achievement of same objectives, as their national interests were not conflicting, and considering that both recognize that their participation in the six-party talks establishes their importance to the peace and stability of Northeast Asia beyond the nuclear crisis.