The National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP) hosted a U.S.-Japan-Russia Trilateral Conference in New York from March 10-11, 2016. Our partners for the day and a-half Track II meeting were the Russian International Affairs Council in Moscow and Japanese participants primarily from the NCAFP’s Forum on Asia-Pacific Security (FAPS).

The meeting took place at a time of heightened concern because of recent actions that threaten security and stability in Asia and the Pacific: the second missile launch this year by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) only weeks before; cyberattacks on Republic of Korea officials and government offices; and China’s power projection in the South China Sea. Furthermore, relations between the United States and its allies and Russia remain strained over Ukraine and contradictory on Syria, affecting other spheres of cooperation including in the Asia-Pacific; the impact of Prime Minister Abe’s new security policies was unclear with some nations concerned that Japan would continue its pacifist policies nevertheless; and mixed messages from the United States, particularly during an election season, regarding the prioritization of Asia created uncertainty with regard to U.S. commitment in the region and elsewhere.

Against this backdrop, influential scholars, think tank representatives and former officials from Japan, the Russian Federation and the United States explored ways to build on our common interests and to manage and possibly reduce differences. They discussed current and future security challenges in Asia and the Pacific; economic, environmental and security cooperation in the Arctic; energy development in Northeast Asia; and economic development in Eurasia.

Opportunities for Further Cooperation

Participants agreed that there are realistic opportunities for further cooperation among the three countries and there is utility in continuing the dialogue. They identified the following issues that should be addressed further:

1. The extent to which cooperation among Japan, Russia and the United States can expand in Northeast Asia despite tensions and disagreements among them in Europe and the Middle East.
2. Potential advantages of creating a “North Pacific Partnership,” consisting of Japan, Russia, the United States, and other concerned countries of the region, to discuss security measures and economic development, including energy resources and distribution networks.

3. Enhanced engagement of Japan and other non-Arctic state observers in working groups of the Arctic Council.

4. Trilateral cooperation on Arctic maritime safety and environmental protection, investment including the private sector in maritime infrastructure, research on Arctic climate change and development of new confidence building measures for Arctic security.

5. Possible cooperation in the development of infrastructure projects in Eurasia.

6. Continued cooperation in denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula and exploration of possible cooperation in the socio-economic development of the Peninsula.

The participant list for the trilateral meeting appears in the appendix. Following is a summary of the rich discussion at the trilateral meeting.

Security Challenges in Asia and the Pacific

Participants generally agreed that there was an overall deterioration in the security environment in the Asia-Pacific region. This decline is due to a number of factors.

Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

They deemed a nuclear-armed Democratic People’s Republic of Korea the greatest, most immediate threat to security in the region. They agreed that a DPRK with nuclear weapons was unacceptable and that increased cooperation to prevent the DPRK’s nuclear development was needed. There was not, however, unity about the urgency of dealing with the threat.

For some participants time is not on our side, as recent assessments indicate that North Korea could achieve nuclear-striking capability within two years. In light of the DPRK’s isolation, safeguards for nuclear materials are not evident, and the chance of an accident is possibly greater. Furthermore, the DPRK’s actions to skirt sanctions and other restrictions could lead to volatile materials falling into the wrong hands, possibly even into the hands of terrorists. The level of international support for the recently adopted U.N. sanctions (Resolution 2270) reflected growing international concern. Participants welcomed the stronger stance taken by China and the Republic of Korea and noted that Chinese implementation is essential for an effective impact. A Russian participant pointed to U.S.-Russia cooperation on Iran as an example of a way forward. But an American participant noted that cooperation proved effective
as the United States’ “bad cop” held out the threat of force, and the Russian “good cop” exerted
influence through assistance. At question is the degree of Russian leverage on the DPRK.

Other participants noted that, while recently adopted sanctions are important and need
to be observed, these sanctions would not be effective without negotiations. The DPRK’s nuclear
program did not emanate from nothing but from concerns resulting from a divided peninsula.
Not only was there a need to negotiate the abandonment of a nuclear program but also a need
for dialogue to conclude a peace treaty. A Russian participant stated that a political solution is
essential to reducing the threat and emphasized that, while Russia did not accept a nuclear
DPRK, the DPRK’s actions are defensive against a perceived threat. The DPRK, he noted,
wanted to be recognized by the United States and the Republic of Korea. A Japanese participant
questioned the utility of negotiations, noting previous Japanese efforts were rebuffed.

Participants also noted that many of the actions of the DPRK regime, including the
development of a nuclear program, were carried out based on domestic security considerations.
Regime stability and survival were foremost in the minds of Kim Jung-un and his security
services. There is a new confidence among North Koreans and a serious desire to demonstrate
that they are a legitimate player in the region. Some participants argued for a prioritization—
concern for the DPRK’s nuclear program over concern for its domestic policies—in order to
persuade the government to abandon its nuclear activities.

Regarding Korean unification, participants pointed to a reluctant China, the financial
burden such a scenario would place on South Korea and regional skepticism. A Japanese
participant noted that a unified, nuclear-armed Korea would be the worst outcome for Japan.

An American participant stressed that there were several potential areas of cooperation
on DPRK among the three countries beyond the denuclearization issue: tension reduction
measures (to include eventually tradeoffs between military exercises and nuclear development
and testing), counterterrorism discussions, and dialogue on economic and development issues
on a unified peninsula. He noted Russian expertise in demobilization, dismantlement, energy,
rail, nuclear doctrine/crisis prevention and Japan’s development legacy in the region as
pertinent to these discussions.

Regional Objectives of Japan, Russia and the United States

While a rising China was not discussed at length, it proved to be the backdrop for
discussions of national interests, objectives and roles of Japan, Russia and the United States in
the Asia-Pacific.

A Japanese participant described Japan’s new security policies under Prime Minister
Abe. Japan had moved from pacifism to proactive pacifism, or better put, proactive contribution
to international security. Japan would now act in accordance with the U.S.-Japan Defense
Guidelines. While the Japanese constitution allowed for military action in self-defense, it
precluded until recently action as part of collective self-defense. Abe’s administration now
posits, that to be a peace-loving nation, one must go beyond not being militaristic and must be
prepared to play a role in promoting international security. That said, it remains to be seen the degree to which the Japanese people would be willing to engage in collective self-defense. This posture raises questions about Japan’s willingness to challenge threats to security in the region and beyond.

Another Japanese participant noted that the strategic chemistry between Japan and China is not improving. The U.S. regional strategy lacked clarity, and U.S. primacy in the region is weakening. Russia and China’s strategic goals are to multi-polarize the world, with the United States resisting unsuccessfully. While Japan and Russia had many common interests, another Japanese participant emphasized that of utmost importance for Japan was maintenance of a rules-based order, and Russia’s actions in Ukraine cast doubt over Russia’s ability to be a reliable partner in Asia.

A Russian participant stated that the driving forces of Russia’s shift to the Asia-Pacific are economic and political. It is not accurate to assume that disagreement over the conflict in Ukraine precipitated the rebalance, but the Ukrainian conflict did contribute to its acceleration. From an economic perspective, Russia’s focus on the East could yield diversification of energy markets, regional markets beyond energy, infrastructure development and new transit opportunities with the One Belt, One Road initiative. From a political perspective, the shift would allow for a role in the solution of key regional problems and avoid the emergence of a bipolar system with the United States and China representing competing poles. Russia favored a flexible multipolar regional system whose key feature is asymmetry. Russia would not be focused on the Chinese market only but also be prepared to diversify trade, which would be beneficial for Russia and China as well as other regional players. Russia’s strategic partnership with China does not imply a military alliance. Another Russian participant emphasized that the turn to Asia is not tactical or simply strategic but determined by fundamental economic factors. Yet another Russian participant noted that the security architecture in the region is a remnant of the Cold War. Russia has an interest in U.S. involvement in Northeast Asia and in cooperating with the United States along with Asian countries and organizations. Such cooperation in the region could help to relax tensions elsewhere.

An American participant noted that Russia had been absent from the United States’ mental map of Asia for the past 25 years. The most striking indication of this view is revealed in a 2011 article by then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton entitled “America’s Pacific Century,” which did not mention Russia once during a broad discussion of geopolitical and economic challenges and opportunities in a region of utmost strategic importance to the United States. Today this disregard, he stated, ill serves the United States, for an active Russia in Asia could help shape a strategic future favorable to the United States and Japan. Of the possible scenarios for the future of Asia (restoration of American hegemony, Chinese hegemony, etc.), we appear to be heading toward a continental-maritime divide, with China heading a bloc of countries on the continent, including Russia, and the United States leading a bloc of off-shore islands, including Japan and maritime powers. This bipolarization does not auger well for security and prosperity. Our objective, he said, should be to work toward a multipolar scenario, beginning in Northeast Asia, where issues that plague U.S.-Russia relations elsewhere are absent or muted. Here, Japan could play a significant role, as Japan sees Russia as a potential partner in dealing with
North Korea and the strategic issue of China’s role in the region. The pursuit of this multipolar arrangement would have to be linked to the easing of tensions in Europe and the Middle East.

**The Arctic—the New Frontier**

Participants discussed the opportunities and challenges brought about by increased access to and development in the Arctic. Several participants noted that the Arctic is the new frontier, but it is also a peaceful and stable region. One participant noted that the Arctic is at the epicenter of anthropogenic climate change, a key connection of the Arctic to the globe. While there are opportunities for increased security, environmental and economic cooperation, there is a need to avoid militarization.

An American participant noted that 68 percent of the Arctic is ocean, and this space is governed by the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea. There are eight Arctic states, six indigenous people groups and 12 non-Arctic state observers (as well as nine intergovernmental organizations and 11 nongovernmental organizations) making up the Arctic Council, an intergovernmental forum (not a treaty body). He emphasized that the Council’s charter focuses on environmental protection and sustainable development; fishing, whaling and military issues are not addressed by the Council. That said, 10 percent of the world’s fishing is from the Arctic, as is 30 percent of the world’s undiscovered gas and 10 percent of its oil, and other key minerals (nickel, zinc, iron ore and rare earths). Economically the Arctic is less important to the United States and Canada in terms of their GNPs. However, the Arctic is highly important to resource economies like Norway and Russia. There are significant opportunities for greater cooperation with Japan in the Arctic, and Japan, as an observer state, should increase its role. China, another observer state, has had limited contribution to the working groups of the Council, although it is evident that China wants to play a greater role. The Arctic is an area where the United States and Russia have experienced productive cooperation, and American participants expected this cooperation to continue in the Arctic Council and maritime affairs. The United States, Russia and Japan meet regularly within a host of international organizations and could work together on Arctic issues in these forums. An American participant noted that some experts and analysts want to apply a NATO construct to the Arctic, but this concept is unrealistic as three of the eight Arctic states (Finland, Russia and Sweden) are not members of NATO.

A Japanese participant stated that, since the end of the Cold War, power politics in the Arctic had been relatively stable, but it was now evolving. He emphasized that Japan intends to be a proactive contributor to international security in the region, is committed to the system set up by the Arctic Council and hopes to enhance its ability to play a greater role on Arctic issues. The Japanese participant foresaw three major challenges: securing maritime safety (including for search and rescue operations), where transparency is essential; opening the Arctic to the global economy; and the impact of deterioration in the U.S.-Russia relationship on Arctic cooperation. He noted that Russia had begun to reopen many of its Siberian military facilities and had installed surface-to-air missiles within the Arctic Circle, and he asked why there was a need to install heavy military capabilities in the region. Another Japanese participant asked if the Arctic sea routes would ever become commercially viable. Other participants replied that
trans-Arctic shipping is unlikely in the near term. However, an American participant noted that destinational voyages are a reality today with ships carrying natural resources out of the Arctic to global markets.

A Russian participant emphasized that there has been considerable cooperation among all Arctic powers despite disagreements on and tensions over other geopolitical issues. Arctic exploration has been peaceful, but, because the Arctic is now considered the “future of the world,” many may want to claim their share of the treasure. This competition could lead to conflict. The five Arctic Ocean coastal states broke new ground, such as the recent agreement on limiting fishing in the central Arctic Ocean, which goes beyond national territorial borders of the coastal states. Arctic Council members and observers have suspended energy drilling, exploration and military exercises. There are also ample opportunities for greater cooperation: implementation of an International Maritime Organization Polar Code for ships operating in Arctic waters; scientific cooperation of all kinds; and an agreement on central Arctic fishing that permits fishing in sustainable areas only. The Russian participant stressed that he did not perceive an arms race in the Arctic, nor did he foresee military conflict. There are, however, ongoing strategic military operations in the region: Russia has a fleet whose mission possesses submarines with nuclear missile capabilities, but the United States no longer patrols the Arctic with nuclear missile submarines. Instead the United States carries out such patrols in the Pacific and in the Atlantic. There are non-strategic forces on islands under the territorial control of the Arctic states and stabilizing military forces in all of the Arctic Council states. There will be issues of environmental security to address. But for military security, working together has been and will continue to be a significant confidence-building measure.

Energy Development in Northeast Asia

Participants concentrated the discussion on the current and future energy mixes, sources of supply and future demand and ecological consequences. They considered situations which would give rise to further competition in energy development as well as the need for cooperation.

A Russian participant described Russia’s energy strategy in Northeast Asia and emphasized that it was in Russia’s interests to diversify oil and gas exports. The participant further stressed that it was important to go beyond gas and oil prices today and look to the potential costs in five to seven years. A key factor for future costs is China. China’s economic slowdown was anticipated but not its rapidity. The increase in services and decrease in industry has affected Chinese demand for electricity, which is the lowest in 40 years. China’s aim is, on the one hand, to monopolize its energy intensive industries, and, on the other hand, to de-monopolize energy producers in order to increase competition and profits. Given the decrease in price, from global demand and markets, and the desire of Japan and China to lower prices, the economic viability for Russian projects is in question. The Russian participant stressed that a potential for future energy cooperation is through an Asian super-grid initiative. Such an initiative would allow electricity produced in Mongolia or Russia to be easily exported to countries throughout Asia. The viability of a super-grid would largely depend on Chinese
enthusiasm and assistance. The participant noted that China has already agreed to initiatives to increase the use of renewable energy in the region and to create an interconnected grid to facilitate exportation.

A Japanese participant stated that there are three pillars of Japan’s Russia policy: economic cooperation, including energy; security cooperation, keeping in mind a rising China as well as a nuclear North Korea; and resolution of the territorial issue of the islands. Cooperation in the first two areas could pave the way for a resolution of the third. Russia has been dependent on European markets, with 50 percent of energy exports going to Europe and only 10 percent going to the Asia and Pacific. The lack of infrastructure in eastern Siberia prevented Russia from expanding exports to the region. After the 2011 Fukushima accident, there were expectations that Tokyo and Moscow would expand their cooperation but that did not materialize. Expansion has most potential in the Sakhalin gas fields, but two issues prevent further development: sanctions on Russian entities adopted in response to Russia’s Ukraine policies and concerns regarding Russia’s legal system and commercial practices. The Japanese participant proposed a “de-coupling” of policy toward Russia, that is, pursuit of a different policy in Northeast Asia from that carried out in Europe. He stressed that active U.S. engagement in such an approach was needed. He noted that the United States managed to differentiate between its cooperation with Russia on Ukraine from that in the Middle East. Another Japanese participant echoed consideration of a proposal for “de-coupling” policies and stressed that such an approach would be in everyone’s interest as it could weaken Russia’s shift to China.

An American participant noted that in 2015 China surpassed the United States to become the world’s largest importer of oil, although it consumes less than the United States per capita. While Russia is the world’s largest gas exporter, mostly of pipeline gas, the United States in 2016 became a liquefied natural gas (LNG) exporter. Despite the expected growth of U.S. LNG exports over the next years, it is not clear to what extent the United States can supply Japan. Japan is the world’s largest LNG importer and buys some LNG from Russia’s Sakhalin-2 project in which Japanese companies are investors. For oil, both Japan and China rely heavily on the Middle East and to a much lesser extent on Russia. Given unrest in the Middle East, their reliance on Russia should be growing, but it has not reached its potential. Japanese and Chinese companies have yet to acquire major stakes in Russia oil and gas fields as well as pipelines in Eastern Siberia. China has returned to Central Asia, investing in fields and pipelines in Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, to solidify its oil and gas diversification. Eurasia has become very important to meet China’s energy needs. At the same time, the participant noted that there are so many unknowns regarding sources of energy that committing to expensive projects with today’s prices does not seem viable to investors. For example, while a Sakhalin gas pipeline to Japan has been studied, its viability is unclear. Finally, Japan and China also remain large coal consumers. Moving forward on developing renewable sources of energy is a way out of their coal dependence. Another American participant noted that while Alaska held large oil, gas and coal deposits, the lack of infrastructure has prevented the state from reaching its potential.
Economic Development in Eurasia

Participants discussed the various mechanisms established to increase development and cooperation in Eurasia, in particular the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), the One Belt, One Road Initiative (OBOR) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). They addressed the question of inevitable competition among these programs as they differ in composition and objectives. The EEU is a narrow partnership that resembles the European Union. OBOR focuses on development of infrastructure. And TPP is an integration initiative that includes issues such as intellectual property rights not only trade. The participants agreed that the goal of these initiatives should be increased security and prosperity for the three countries. Several said that, while these “mega-blocs” could foster competition that is beneficial to overall development, there is also a need for greater coordination among them in attenuating potential tensions or differences in regulations and standards.

An American participant noted that there are a number of forces at play in today’s world: at the opposite end of globalization we see utter fragmentation and the collapse of states. We also see regionalization, which is a natural outgrowth of globalization. The lowering of trade barriers has increased competition among countries, and regionalization is a defense of the market; countries can continue to take advantage of globalization while still protecting their region. There is an increasing sense that trade liberalization may have run a ground because of the collapse of the last Doha Round. The EEU despite its ambitions is not likely to achieve strong stake-holding because of the decline of the Russian economy and the collapse of oil prices. On the other hand, OBOR, with 60 countries involved, will widen markets and produce greater interdependence. It decreases Chinese dependence on maritime sea lanes, which the United States dominates, aiding the lifeblood of the Chinese economy. China has emerged as the greatest source of capital for OBOR and for investment in Central Asia. The participant stressed that the result of China’s policy is a chipping away of the strategic bond between Russia and Central Asia since the 17th century.

A Russian participant emphasized that economic policy has become an increasingly important factor in regional security. Clearly there are risks of tensions among the mega blocks and key regional groupings. Many in Russia say that the EEU is important as Eurasia is a significant aspect of Russian identity (Russia is both Asia and Europe). But there is also an economic rationale—the Russian determination to create a zone of development and a viable integration that raises the growth potential of the region and Russia, itself. Moreover, the EEU is not only about trade but includes issues like remittances, labor market integration and security. Russia views OBOR as dovetailing its aspirations to develop the region. It will require enormous outlays for infrastructure but will be favorable to Russia in the long term. The TPP could turn out to be another WTO for Russia—a gruesome procedure to join an organization that does not turn out to be as beneficial as one thought. And it is an organization that has not yet been formed. On the positive side, TPP is generating pressure on Russia and eliciting positive responses. ASEAN may be a gateway to engage the TPP, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization could be an alternative track. Russia is keeping its options open and looking for ways to cooperate. APEC may be a mechanism to multi-lateralize the discussions regarding TPP and other mechanisms. Another possible track is the creation of a “North Pacific Partnership”
that would involve economic issues including energy, the Arctic and security. In the near term, the realistic track is sectoral projects and regional investment.

Prime Minister Abe’s policy toward Russia, according to a Japanese participant, was threefold: economic, geopolitical and political. From the economic perspective, Japan seeks cooperation in energy, transportation, communications, environmental issues, health and medicine, trade and investment and regional ties. Japan is a reliable market for Russia and enables Russia to diversify its trade away from Europe and its traditional partners. From the geopolitical perspective, both China and the United States are important to Japan: China as a major trading partner and the United States for its security guarantees. For contemporary Russia, whose population in the Far East is only 6 million, maintaining a strategic partnership with China is a top priority. China’s military expansion is a threat to Japan but potentially could be a threat to Russia as well. Enhanced Japanese-Russian economic cooperation would strengthen both countries and provide a counterweight to a rising China. Politically, Prime Minister Abe hopes to carry out his father’s legacy of improving relations with Russia; his ultimate goal is a resolution of the territorial dispute. Japan and Russia are neither friend nor foe. Abe could maintain the status quo but prefers to enhance Japan’s strategic position despite some discomfort from major ally, the United States. Another Japanese participant stated that Japan announced plans to invest 100 billion dollars in Asia. This investment is Japan’s response to the Chinese OBOR initiative. Japan has been losing high speed rail projects to China in the region, although Japan has a competitive advantage in this area. Japan clearly wants to play in the Eurasian market.

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Mutual of America
Russian International Affairs Council
**THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY (NCAFP)**

*PRESENTS*

**A U.S.-JAPAN-RUSSIA TRILATERAL**

**MARCH 10TH & 11TH, 2016**

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