

An essential read for understanding Russia's relations with Southeast Asia and, more broadly, the Global South.

Professor Sergey Radchenko, Wilson E. Schmidt Distinguished Professor, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies; author of *To Run the World: The Kremlin's Cold War Bid for Global Power*

This is a timely, balanced account of the most understudied side of Russia's "Turn to the East". Russia's continued role as a player in Southeast Asia may be exaggerated in Moscow, but it continues to be seen as a global power with a relatively benign image. Country-by-country, Storey assesses the shifting state of their ties to Russia. Despite its small economic footprint and limited geopolitical impact, Russia matters due to lasting regional memories, slow weaning from arms dependency and the search for multiple partners for hedging. Yet, even as the political fallout of the all-out war in Ukraine proved quite manageable, the war undermined Russia's economic standing and its long-term interests. Storey explains Russia's successes in the region, peaking in the mid-2010s, and warns that the latest developments are an act of self-destruction that will cost Russia dearly.

Professor Gilbert Rozman, Emeritus Musgrave Professor of Sociology, Princeton University; co-editor of *Putin's "Turn to the East" in the Xi Jinping Era*

Ian Storey has written the most comprehensive analysis yet of Russia's complex relations with Southeast Asia. In shedding light on a much neglected, but increasingly important subject, his book combines detailed research and incisive writing. This is a valuable addition to the literature on Russian foreign policy.

Dr Bobo Lo, Lowy Institute; author of *The Disorderly Society: Rethinking Global Governance for the Twenty-First Century*

Putin's Russia and Southeast Asia

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Putin's Russia and Southeast Asia

*The Kremlin's Pivot to Asia and the
Impact of the Russia-Ukraine War*

Ian Storey

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*In memory of three great friends,
Sam Bateman, Dick Bitzinger and Bron Percival*

Contents

<i>List of Tables and Figure</i>	xi
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xii
<i>Preface and Acknowledgements</i>	xvii
1. Introduction	1
2. Russia's Post-Soviet Foreign Policy and the Kremlin's "Turn to the East"	29
3. Russia's Relations with East, South and Southeast Asia	56
4. Russia's Economic Engagement with Southeast Asia: A Minnow Among Whales	106
5. Russia and ASEAN: Unfulfilled Potential, Unmet Expectations	157
6. Russia's Defence Diplomacy in Southeast Asia: A Farewell to Arms?	205
7. Russia's Relations with Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia	275

8. Russia's Relations with Thailand and Myanmar	321
9. Russia's Relations with Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei	368
10. Russia's Relations with Singapore, the Philippines and Timor-Leste	421
11. Conclusion: The Past, Present and Future of Russia-Southeast Asia Relations	454
 <i>Bibliography</i>	468
<i>Index</i>	483
<i>About the Author</i>	503

List of Tables and Figure

Tables

3.1	Russian Presidential Visits to Southeast Asia, 2000–24	85
3.2	Southeast Asian Countries' Voting Behaviour at the UNGA on Russia's Invasion of Ukraine, 2022–23	92
4.1	Trade Between the ASEAN-10 and Russia, 2000–23	111–12
4.2	Russia's Trade with the Ten ASEAN Member States, 2000–23	114
5.1	Russia's Participation in the EAS, 2011–24	168
6.1	Russia's Top Five Arms Buyers, 2014–23	212
6.2	Top Six Arms Exporters to Southeast Asia, 2000–23	212
6.3	Russia's Arms Sales to Southeast Asian Countries, 2000–23	216
6.4	Russia's Pacific Fleet Port Calls to Southeast Asia, 2010–24	243
6.5	Russia's Military Exercises with Southeast Asian Countries, 2014–24	245–49
6.6	Southeast Asian Participation in the International Army Games	252

Figure

6.1	Arms Exports to Southeast Asia from Top Six Country Suppliers, 2000–23	214
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Abbreviations

ABRI	<i>Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia</i> (Indonesian Armed Forces)
ACD	Asia Cooperation Dialogue
ACMX	ASEAN-China Maritime Exercise
ADMM-Plus	ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus
AFC	Asian Financial Crisis
AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
AMM	ASEAN Ministerial Meeting
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
APT	ASEAN Plus Three
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ARJCC	ASEAN-Russia Joint Cooperation Committee
ARNEX	ASEAN-Russia Naval Exercise
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEM	Asia-Europe Meeting
AUKUS	Australia-United Kingdom-United States
AUMX	ASEAN-US Maritime Exercise
BATAN	National Atomic Energy Agency
BCP	Burmese Communist Party
BNPP	Bataan Nuclear Power Plant
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa
CAATSA	Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act

CCG	China Coast Guard
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CMAC	Cambodian Mine Action Centre
CNST	Centre for Nuclear Science and Technology
COMECON	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
CPA	Comprehensive Programme of Action
CPM	Communist Party of Malaya
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
CPTPP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
CPV	Communist Party of Vietnam
CSP	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
CUES	Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea
DEA	Drug Enforcement Agency
DIS	Defence Industrial Sector
DK	Democratic Kampuchea
DND	Department of National Defense
DNRI	Dalat Nuclear Research Institute
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)
EAEC	East Asia Economic Caucus
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organization
EAS	East Asia Summit
EDCA	Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement
EEF	Eastern Economic Forum
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EPG	Eminent Persons Group
ESA	European Space Agency
EU	European Union
EWG	Expert Working Groups
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia

FEFU	Far Eastern Federal University
FIRST	Foundational Infrastructure for Responsible Use of Small Modular Reactor Technology
FNPP	Floating Nuclear Power Plant
FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
FPC	Five Point Consensus
FPDA	Five Power Defence Arrangements
FSB	Federal Security Service
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GEP	Greater Eurasian Partnership
GFC	Global Financial Crisis
HADR	Humanitarian and Disaster Relief
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IAG	International Army Games
IFC	Information Fusion Centre
IISS	International Institute for Strategic Studies
ILRS	International Lunar Research Station
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INTERFET	International Force East Timor
ISRO	Indian Space Research Organisation
ISS	International Space Station
JIT	Joint Investigation Team
KGB	Committee for State Security
LGBT	Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
LPAF	Lao People's Armed Forces
LPDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LPRP	Lao People's Revolutionary Party
MAF	Myanmar Air Force
MAI	Myanmar Airways International
MANPADS	Man-Portable Air-Defence Systems
MDT	Mutual Defense Treaty
MFP	Move Forward Party
MGIMO	Moscow State Institute of International Relations
MN	Myanmar Navy

MRCA	Multi-Role Combat Aircraft
MTCR	Missile Technology Control Regime
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NARTT	Network of ASEAN-Russia Think Tanks
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NLD	National League for Democracy
NPP	Nuclear Power Plant
NPT	Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
NSR	Northern Sea Route
NUG	National Unity Government
NWS	Nuclear Weapon States
OBOR	One Belt, One Road
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (formerly Organisation of the Islamic Conference)
PDF	People's Defence Force
PKI	<i>Partai Komunis Indonesia</i> (Communist Party of Indonesia)
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PN	Philippine Navy
PNP	Philippine National Police
PRC	People's Republic of China
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
RCAF	Royal Cambodian Armed Forces
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
ReCAAP	Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia
RFE	Russian Far East
RMAF	Royal Malaysian Air Force
ROK	Republic of Korea (South Korea)
RTAF	Royal Thai Air Force
RuAF	Russian Armed Forces
RUSPACFLT	Russian Pacific Fleet
RVP	Rusvietpetro
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAC	State Administration Council

SAF	Singapore Armed Forces
SAR	Search and Rescue
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SEANWFZ	Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SLD	Shangri-La Dialogue
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SMR	Small Modular Reactor
SWIFT	Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Tele-communication
TAC	Treaty of Amity and Cooperation
TNI	<i>Tentara Nasional Indonesia</i> (Indonesian Armed Forces)
TPNW	Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons
UAF	Ukraine Armed Forces
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNMISET	United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor
UNPKO	United Nations Peacekeeping Operation
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNTAET	United Nations Transitional Authority in East Timor
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
VFA	Visiting Forces Agreement
VIDEX	Vietnam International Defence Exhibition
VPA	Vietnam People's Army
VPAF	Vietnam People's Air Force
VPN	Vietnam People's Navy
VSP	Vietsovpetro
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
ZOPFAN	Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality

Preface and Acknowledgements

The winter of 1987 was an exciting time in East-West relations. By that point, Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), had been in power for a little over two and a half years. Relatively youthful and energetic, Gorbachev was a breath of fresh air in the Kremlin after a succession of sick, grey and elderly Soviet leaders—Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko—and had startled the world with his straight-talking, candid assessment of his country’s economic problems, his clarion call for far-ranging reforms and his push to improve relations with the West and China. He was, as British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher so famously said, someone the West could do business with.

It was in November 1987 that I visited Russia on my very first overseas trip. At that time, I was a 17-year-old lad living on Tyneside in the Northeast of England. An A-Level student, I was fascinated with history and international affairs. Eager to see at firsthand what was happening behind the Iron Curtain, I joined a package tour with the state-owned travel agency Intourist and jetted off from London’s Gatwick Airport with the state-owned airline Aeroflot on a Tupolev-154, the workhorse of the fleet. I spent a week in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), taking in the historic sights of Moscow—where I was lucky enough to catch the tail end of the military parade in Red Square

to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the 1917 October Revolution—the Arctic city of Murmansk, and Leningrad, as St. Petersburg was still called in those days. The hotel food was mediocre at best, service was universally surly and the shelves in the shops were largely empty. But there was palpable sense of hope and optimism for the country’s future and East-West relations.

Two years later, while reading history at the University of Hull, I watched with amazement as the countries of Eastern Europe threw off their Soviet shackles and the Berlin Wall came tumbling down. Two years after that, and now working in Hong Kong as an English teacher, I watched the Soviet Union dissolve itself on 26 December 1991 and the birth of the Russian Federation. Bereft of its superpower status, and preoccupied with economic and political problems, Russia’s importance on the world stage rapidly receded. At the same time, my academic curiosity was gravitating towards the rise of a proto-superpower, China, and the implications for Southeast Asia. But I continued to consume books and articles about Russian history and politics. While studying for my master’s degree in International Relations in Japan from 1993 to 1995, I ran into hard-up young Russians on the streets of Niigata city, where one could still travel to Vladivostok by ferry. In some ways they were metaphors for the trauma the Russian Federation itself experienced throughout the 1990s.

I did not return to Russia until 2013. Some 26 years after my first visit, everything had changed and nothing had changed. Moscow now looked very prosperous. The shops in the famous GUM department store on Red Square sold nothing but expensive designer brands, except for one lone store selling traditional Russian handicrafts, such as Matryoshka dolls. The food and wine had improved immeasurably. Yet, a strongman, President Vladimir Putin, still occupied the Kremlin, while relations with the West had grown testy and were getting worse. By then I was working in Singapore as a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (renamed the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute in 2015), and my research was focused on Southeast Asia’s relations with China. However, prompted by Moscow’s “Turn to the East” policy in 2012, I began to think and write

about Russia's role and interests in Southeast Asia, too. Between 2013 and 2019, I travelled to Russia half a dozen times to attend academic conferences and other meetings, allowing me to discuss Russia's regional engagement with academics, think tankers, government officials, foreign diplomats and journalists.

In 2021, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, I decided it was time to put my knowledge of Russia and Southeast Asia to use and write a book about their relationship in the twenty-first century. When I put pen to paper, however, I could not have imagined that, just a year later, Putin would order his troops to invade Ukraine, triggering the bloodiest conflict in Europe since the end of the Second World War and plunging Russia's relations with the West to their lowest point in my lifetime. Against the backdrop of this conflict, Russia's engagement with Southeast Asia suddenly gained newfound prominence. The Russia-Ukraine War would complicate my endeavour, but also make it much more interesting, timely and relevant.

In researching this book, I was fortunate enough to talk with many knowledgeable and insightful people across Southeast Asia.

In Singapore, I would like to thank my employer, the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, and especially its director and CEO, Mr Choi Shing Kwok, for allowing me time to write this book and for providing financial support for fieldwork in Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Hanoi, Manila and Bangkok. Moreover, I would like to acknowledge the help and support of my outstanding colleagues: Ms Hoang Thi Ha; Dr William Choong; Dr Le Hong Hiep; Ms Sue-Ann Lee; Dr Termsak Chalermpalanupap; Ms Moe Thuzar; Ms Sharon Seah; Ms Joanne Lin; Dr Vannarith Chheang (when he was a visiting fellow at ISEAS); and Mr Gregory Luk Pei Wei and Mr Eugene Tan Rui Lie for their research assistance in 2022 and 2023–24, respectively. At the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, thanks are due to my good friend, the late Mr Richard Bitzinger, as well as to Dr Collin Koh and Dr Olli Pekka Suorsa. Dr Tim Huxley, formerly the director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) Asia office in Singapore (and my lecturer in Southeast Asian studies at the University of Hull in 1990–91), provided invaluable insights into Russia's participation in the Shangri-La Dialogue. Dr Evan Laksmana, also at

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*Ian Storey
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