

ASIAN PACIFIC – GLOBAL CONFLICT POTENTIAL

Review article

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Abstract:

The paper deals with the Asia-Pacific region, which is, with its geopolitical and geostrategic characteristics, one of the most important areas of the modern world, and the dynamics and character of processes that take place in it have huge implications on international politics. The underlying hypothesis of this work is that powerful potentials of the Asia Pacific open up the possibility that it will become a true leader of the overall progress in the world, but the conflicts that exist in that area, of which the most destructive territorial disputes are, also have the potential for global scale confrontation.

The geostrategic significance, transport corridors, huge reserves of oil and gas, the highest concentration of human resources, as well as high technological achievements make the Asia Pacific region one of the most powerful drivers of the development and progress of the modern world. Such a unique position of the Asian Pacific contributes to a strong concentration of the interests of international politics in the region. Of course, the Asia Pacific is a place where the most important geopolitical and geo-strategic interests of the most important actors of contemporary international politics are in conflict. These circumstances make the region one of the most vulnerable areas of the modern world in the security sense. Primary causes of the conflict are economic as well as geo-strategic characteristics of the area. On the top of the numerous and complex Asian issues, are conflicts between China and the US, which primarily determine the character of relations in the region.

Authors conclude that US-Chinese rivalry and competition with a progressive tendency are unstoppable and with their complexity are hardly controlled, so there is a

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real danger of radicalization of their relations, with simultaneous radicalization of relations across the region. All these contribute to the fact that relations in the Asia Pacific region are very complicated, often vague and unbalanced and potentially explosive, pushing a region of enormous strategic importance into the labyrinth of multiple instability whose implications would have a powerful reflection on security in the world. The arrival of the new US administration announces the toughening of the US bidding with China as its main competitor, which is causing uncertainty about future security trends in the Asia Pacific region.

Key words: *Geopolitics, resources, disputes, instability, China, USA*

INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest geopolitical changes at the end of the first decade of the 21st century is the shift of the geostrategic center from the Euro-Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific region. The meteoric rise of the People's Republic of China among the world's leading forces and the intensification of US interests in the Asia Pacific region has strongly contributed to the Asian Pacific becoming increasingly the role of a new global geopolitical center, hinting at the end of Western global domination and the shift of the East towards the center of global power (Bzezinski, 2013).

Spatial, aquatorial and demographic potentials, energy and other resources and their development potentials strongly contribute to the geopolitical character of the Asian Pacific. The region consists of more than 50 countries with almost four billion inhabitants, which means that more than half of the world's population lives in that area. There are the four most populous countries in the world - China, India, the United States and Indonesia, as well as the four largest surface areas - Russia, Canada, China and the United States. In addition, there are three major economic powers in the area - the United States, China and Japan. Economic power of 21 APEC members account for almost 54% of the world's economic power, and a quarter of the world's gross domestic product is created in the Asia Pacific region (Lai, 2013). It is enough to point out that there are seven of the ten most powerful military forces in this area and that more than half of the world economy is concentrated there. Also, the Asia-Pacific region has enormous development potential because it includes China, India and the countries of Southeast Asia with a young and highly competitive population. These countries constitute a rapidly developing market (Koker, 2006), has high human resources and high demand. The emergence of China as an economic force that has the growth better than any kind of society so far has not had is the best confirmation of the development dynamics of that space. Alongside this fact, the attitude is that the countries of Central and Southeast Asia, Russia, Australia and Canada, have rich natural resources, and the US and Japan are countries with high technology and management experience. Today's largest importers of oil, coal and other fuels are also concentrated in this region. All the most demanding air, maritime corridors and roads are therefore concentrated in that area, which contributes to becoming a global industrial, production and distribution center. For this reason, Asia-Pacific region is by far the economically most dynamic region in the world and one of the most attractive destinations for foreign investments in transport, trade, equipping and many other economic areas

(Lai, 2013). Hence there are many reasons to claim that the position of the world economic hub from Atlansky is transferred to the Asia Pacific region.

Since the beginning of the 1960s, large deposits of fuels and minerals have been found in this area, which has increased the interest of many countries for their exploitation. The East China and South China Sea are areas where important gas and oil fields have been discovered, with the South China Sea being one of the world's three largest oil and gas fields located below the sea surface. It is especially important to note that the East China Sea represents the lobby of the Pacific Ocean basin, so its positioning is an exceptional strategic privilege. Also, the South China Sea is also known as the "intersection in the Far East". It is known that more than 25% of world trade going by sea passes through the South China Sea. The "Malay Passage" has special significance in this regard, as it is closely related to the energy security of China and Japan. Almost 80% of the oil that is imported to China goes through that seas and the South China Sea, and because of its importance, this passage is called the "line of life" in Japan.

At the same time, the Asia Pacific is a region of contradictions and a host of contradictory tendencies due to the extremely complex geopolitical and geo-strategic characteristic. It is a region in which countries practice different concepts of social and political structure, varying degrees of economic development, different religious beliefs, maritime and landlocked regions. China, North Korea, and Vietnam are countries that persist in the socialist perspective on social organization concepts, while the United States, Japan and South Korea are typical capitalist countries, while Russia, India and countries in Central Asia are countries that have a mixed state system. In this region are represented countries with all degrees of development and wealth, from the richest to the poorest. Regarding religion and culture, all the world's religions, from Christianity and Islam to Buddhism and Taoism, are present in the countries of the region. At the same time, a huge number of different languages and traditions are present in the region, and the differences in the region are noticeable in terms of the characteristic capabilities of the armed forces, so the United States and Japan are traditionally strong naval forces, while China and Russia are traditional strong land forces (Senhua, 2013).

The specificities of the region are numerous disputes and conflicts that possess destructive potential and which make the region very sensitive in the security sense. Current disputes are those over sovereignty over certain territories, division in the Korean peninsula, the problem of the status of the Chinese province of Taiwan, including historically unfinished discussions on the Japanese invasion and the occupation of states in the region in the Second World War. The economic and political importance of the East and South China Sea is enormous, so the responsibilities over the marine areas, their vast resources and their communication potentials are one of the main reasons for the conflicts and conflicts in the Asian Pacific. The most important territorial disputes over the East China Sea are mainly the relations between China, South Korea and Japan, and the division of the "exclusive economic belt" is a major problem for all three countries, which means that economic problems are at the root of the problem. Territorial disputes between Russia and Japan include a strong geostrategic component, bearing in mind the importance of the Kuril Islands for unrestricted access to the Pacific Ocean. The "frozen conflict" situation in the Korean Peninsula has a special weight, which is one of the results of the Cold War of the 1950s,² where every change, given the particularly strong interests of

² Military deflection line "between North and South Korea represented the border where the United States and the Soviet Union accepted the surrender of Japanese forces at the end of the Second World War.

the great powers, is also a symbol of the change of the entire geostrategic structure in Northeast Asia. When it comes to the nature of the conflict potential of the South China Sea, the issues of energy and maritime roads make the essence of disputes and problems in the South China Sea, and these rivalries and competitions include all the coastal states of that sea, making this area extremely unstable. Adding to this the long-standing rivalry of China and India, which is sprinkled with expressed antagonisms over their strategic position in the Indian Ocean, the pronounced instability of the Asian Pacific can be fully reflected.

The transition of US-China power, as well as the shift in the geopolitical focus of the US towards the Asian Pacific, complicates long-term relations in the Asia-Pacific region (Lai, 2013), essentially defining the framework of action and conflicts of less significant actors in the region. In other words, the complexity of state relations and their numerous conflicts and conflicts in the Asia Pacific region are in the shadow of China's and China's fierce conflicts, that is, the Big Games in the Pacific, which stems from the Chinese-American competition over strategic maritime positioning as well as the global leadership. China, which is increasingly apparent for the challenger to the global leader and the US, who can no longer be as easy as before to use not only other geostrategic players (Stepic, 2/2014), but also less powerful geopolitical staffs for their interests. At one of the key hubs of the global domination of the United States and in the area where goods are transported in the value of five thousand billions of dollars annually, there it intensifies the strategic competition of declining hegemons, the United States, and its challenger, China. China's increasing self-confidence, but also the undeniable disadvantage of the American-American order, creates the context of dangerous escalations that can turn this region out of the zone of economic optimism into a threat to global peace (Politika, 14/12/2011). It is precisely for this reason that the relationship between China and the United States becomes a determining factor of relations between the countries of the Asian Pacific, in other words, their relations constitute the backbone of the modern geopolitical system of this region and most directly determine the character and dynamics of changes in it.

It's more than clear that trends in the Asia Pacific are strongly mixed and complex. On the one hand, there is a huge potential for the Asian Pacific to become a truly global engine of development in the 21st century, and, on the other hand, numerous conflict risks, of which the most destructive territorial disputes are the urgent security issue of not only the region.

MAIN ACTS OF ASIA PACIFIC

The term "Asian Pacific", which once encompassed a space that coincided with the traditional term "Far East", is no longer a space that is constrained by old dimensions, but rather a traditional geographical term, but a geopolitical space that is constantly changing, whose geopolitical dimension is constantly increasing. Although it is difficult to precisely determine the number of international actors present in that area, undoubtedly the Asian Pacific includes (Lai, 2013) the territory of North-East Asia, China, South and North Korea and Japan, as well as Southeast Asia, including the ten ASEAN coun-

tries (Lai, 2013), East Timor, Australia and New Zealand. Often this region also includes part of Russia in the Far East and South Asia, namely India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, and in the broadest sense, the region includes North and South America, or the region on the coasts of the Pacific.



Picture No.1. Countries in the Asian-Pacific region in the narrow sense - dark green: countries that are always in the region, light green: countries that are often included in the composition of the region

Despite the fact that more than 50 countries of the modern world are located in this area, it is clear that they do not have an equal impact on relations in the Asian Pacific, which is primarily related to the capacity of the power they have. There is no doubt that the United States and China and their foreign policy are the defining factors of the Asian Pacific, and their competitiveness and rivalry are basically the growing conflicting potential of the region. In this context, today no one challenges any more that the biggest change in international politics, especially in the Asia Pacific policy, is China's meteoric rise and its increasingly visible intention to lead global politics. No other country, according to Caygan, has gone beyond the path of weakness to power, (Kejgan, 2009) which will make it increasingly difficult for the years to come to maintain its outstanding role in the world (Bremer, 2006).

It is interesting to note that until the 20th century, China showed no desire to open. Her, and then the numerous population, the vast territory, the possibility of economic self-sufficiency, as well as the centuries-old self-built cultural specialty, made it a special world. Thus, China, as the oldest existing civilization and a country whose population accounted for a quarter of the world's population, remained a world for itself, as a different humanity, incapable of measuring the West (Avijucki, 2009). Social and economic modernization and openings to the world that began in the last decades of the 20th century have opened up areas for the undeveloped development of China and its positioning among the leading global powers. Its international influence is expanding both globally and regionally, and almost double-digit GDP developments and accelerated economic development have contributed to the fact that, as of today, it is ranked by the United States as indicators of economic power, and by some it exceeds it.

In the basis of the Chinese development strategy in the peace that is at the core of its global affirmation is defined, it strengthens its overall capacities and expands its inter-party influence, consistently relying on the careful and meaningful management of its foreign policy action (Wang, Song, 2009). In other words, China is trying to grow into an economic superpower by combining knowledge and market economy, which requires much more intense communication with the rest of the world, but also the need to preserve the peculiarity of its civilizational discourse. It strives to achieve its geopolitical ambitions primarily through economic expansion and thus expand its influence on the areas of Asia, Africa, Europe and America. China has no ambition to conquer new territories, but preserving territorial integrity is considered a supreme national interest, and therefore returning Taiwan within its framework is its main geopolitical task. Also, China's strategic interest is to achieve the dominance of the East China and South China Sea and the control of the island and the bay as an important prerequisite for neutralizing US influence but also for its significant positioning in the Pacific as an exclusively "American" ocean.

Undoubtedly, the geopolitical aspects of China's rise, both its physical and geographical and demographic characteristics, as well as its overall social development and economic progress make it one of the dominant geopolitical actors of modern world politics. For many of the Chinese economic initiative "One Belt One Way" (One Belt, One Road), which seeks to connect the Eurasian land and waterways ambitions can be perceived for its global positioning (Zorko, 2016). Linking the Eurasian masses of land and sea roads has a clear geopolitical ambition, whereby China sees the economy at the core of this connection. At the same time, Chinese actions in the East China and South China Sea show that it is continually expanding its geopolitical role in the Pacific and has consistently increased the impact, strategic strateghia and military development of other Asian powers (Kordesman, 2016). Chinese growth in the global economic power, in particular the increasingly prominent leadership in the Asia Pacific, has a major impact on its relationship with the United States and its neighbors. It seems that there is less and less unknown today whether this, not only the demographic giant grows into a potential rival of the United States, which can oppose its hegemony, becoming an economic super power (Avijucki, 2009).

When it comes to the assumptions of Chinese accelerated development, then the issue of energy and resources is one of its basic problems. The Chinese economy, as the second world economy that has grown up in export-oriented industries and large energy consumers, is becoming vulnerable to faster growth in energy consumption than the overall growth of the economy, and especially from faster energy production, which makes it dependent on increased imports (Mitrovic, Trailovic, 2/2014). Hence its strong strategic engagement for the resources of the Asia Pacific, but also for a strategic partnership with the countries of Central Asia (Kilibarda, 2016), primarily with Kazakhstan and Mongolia, as well as the resources of the Middle East, Africa and Europe and the roads leading to them. The geopolitics and security implications of China's efforts to secure or increase energy security are fueling strong suspicion and opposition in the region, as the Chinese ambitions collide with similar or identical efforts by the United States as a super-superpower, as well as regional powers such as Japan and India. It is known that the strengthening of China's maritime power, which was intended to enable it to effectively control communications lines and routes for transporting oil from the Persian Gulf, across the

Indian Ocean, to its ports, has sparked a strong and multiplied reaction from Japan and other American allies in the region and provided an external incentive for a new wave of armaments in this part of the world.

In the White Paper published in mid-January 2017, China is showing its readiness to assume greater responsibility for securing greater security in the world, especially in the Asia Pacific. Regardless of the fact that the basis of the Chinese view of the peace and stability of the Asian Pacific is the concept of common security, which implies a new system of dialogue and the creation of international and regional rules, the White Paper underscores the unambiguous commitment of China to further strengthen its military potentials in order for the Chinese army to reach level corresponding to the international status of that country. Through the restructuring of the military organization and the application of the most modern achievements of the technological revolution and network-centered warfare, modernization of the aviation forces, the airdefence system, medium-range ballistic missiles, naval aviation and the growing fleet with carriers aircraft, China is approaching a leadership position among military forces, which opens up spaces for a more effective policy in the Asia Pacific and more decisive demands with territorial demands³.

At the same time, the document clearly suggests that China's progress and its global leadership are linked to its ability to control the sea, and, first of all, direct the relationship to its own rules in the Asia Pacific. Hence, bearing in mind that China is a landlocked country, the development of its oriental forces must have a strong focus on the development of the navy. Surely, this ambition leads to a very tough conflict with US interests that are not ready to voluntarily leave their long-awaited position. China is ready to take the necessary measures and response to primordial actions that jeopardize sovereignty and territorial integrity or maritime rights and interests. She underlines her negative attitude towards the US military presence in the Japanese islands and South Korea. As a particularly dangerous activity, seeing the installation of a missile system in South Korea, and its behavior in terms of intensifying its relationship with North Korea.

The characteristics of the Asian Pacific, particularly convincing indicators of the ascent of Asian-Pacific countries, are increasingly suggesting that the future of the world is settled in the Asia Pacific, that is, the future of the world belongs to the Pacific (Koker, 2008). This circumstance, which involves the struggle to preserve the greatly degraded American prestige and weaken its moral superiority, has influenced the vigorous redefinition of US relations to the region, and has prompted the return to the Asia Pacific. In support of such redefinition, the fact is that the economic future of the United States is strongly linked to the Asia Pacific region and that half of the social product is planned to be realized in Asia. At the beginning of 2010, Hilary Clinton, former US Secretary of State, said on this occasion: "The Asia-Pacific region is an axis of world politics and economy. In order for America to continue to have the leadership status in this region, it will strengthen the economic and strategic paternity relationship in the Asia Pacific. "Such an orientation is based on the belief that the issues of the global leader of the United States are not solved in the Atlantic but in the Pacific, that is, the United States can be creator of world history only if the Pacific becomes the stage of its future energy, and it is the main protagonist in the Pacific story (Koker,2008). There is no doubt that China was

³ The Chinese army has 2,335,000 troops, the largest military force in the world.

the invincible force of such a shift in the US foreign policy, which makes it realistic to expect that they will continue to rival, that is, they will fight “to fight quietly while they can,” and that their mutual conflict potential will grow (Kilibarda, Mladenovic, Ajzenhamer, 2014).

The US has activated a return strategy in the Asia-Pacific region, with the aim of building more reliable economic, political and military-security relations with the countries of the region. The clear ambition of such efforts is that America is the main protagonist and shaping the future of the region with its presence, and the realization of this vision implies the diversification of security relations in Asia, military bases and military presence (National Security Strategy of 2015). Such a commitment is clearly recognized in the National Security Strategy of 2015 which highlights the improvement of the rebalance in Asia and the Pacific, an attempt to force the US in the Pacific region, as they have been so far. Basically a rebalance means dislocating 60% of US military forces into the Asia Pacific region, but also the efforts that the United States, as the main protagonist of the Asian Pacific, will build a comprehensive regional economic architecture in which it will lead the main and decisive thing.

At the heart of such a policy is the focus on modernizing the alliance with Japan, South Korea and the Philippines, as well as strengthening mutual relations to provide full capabilities in response to regional and global challenges. The United States is unequivocal to comply with its contractual obligations with South Korea, Japan and Thailand to build a deepened partnership with Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as constructive relations with China. South Korea, Japan and Thailand have a special place in which mechanisms are being put in place to curb the Chinese expansion. In this sense, the strategic move to the Asian Pacific remains an important determinant of the US foreign policy strategy, and its decision to base 60% of its maritime effects in the Pacific Basin can be seen exclusively in the light of China’s strategy of restraint. The sale of weapons to Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the Philippines, and the modernization of their armed forces, as well as the sale of arms to India, is aimed at empowering states in the region with the aim of preventing full Chinese control of the South and East China Sea and extremely important maritime communications in that part of the world. It is particularly important to prevent China from entering the Pacific so that it would continue to be exclusively American and keep it in a state of strategic isolation, and in this process of China’s restraint, a significant place should have partners. Bearing in mind the defined change in the US policy and the change in the strategic focus of the military presence with the 50/50 Atlantic-Pacific to 60/40, there is a surge of conflict situations, especially in the US-China and Asia-Pacific region countries that have many security contracts with the United States.

Of course, the inevitable and increasingly important actors in the Asia Pacific region, in addition to the United States and China, are Russia, India and Japan. For the Russian Federation, the Far East has a very important geopolitical geostrategic role, so its foreign policy focus is strongly directed towards those areas. Russia enjoys a privileged position on the mainland, however, for the leading position, along the mainland, sea is needed. That is why it is important for Russia to have every land in the sea that leads to the sea and, hence, its pronounced interest in areas that have favorable exits to the Pacific in the Far East. This is also the main reason why the Kuril Islands have a special geostrategic significance for Russia. After the Second World War, Russia regained the territories that were lost after the war with Japan in 1905 and expanded to occupy the four islands in

the southern part of the Kuril Islands. In this way, it secured the safety of the passage from Vladivostok to the Pacific through the La Peruz Strait⁴. That is why this maritime corridor, toward the east, has become the most important line for the Russian Navy in the Far East, and any change in this region for Russia is very sensitive, given the weakness of its defense forces in the Far East. However, what is quite clear is that Russia is one of its own poles of interest have moved to this region, and its increasingly intensified bilateral co-operation with China, including increasingly integrated security, especially military content, suggests the possibility of creating more serious security integration⁵.

Japan is by definition the third most important country in the triangle of power in the Asia Pacific. In essence, Japan's global reputation is based on strong economic progress and close ties to the United States, which it guarantees security. Without going into military competition, Japan, after the defeat of World War II, focused its energy on the economic rise that made it one of the global economic powers. His attempt to gain after the Cold War and the status of a political force that corresponds to his economic weight is compounded by the complex of guilt. Japan is burdened with a series of disagreements with its neighbors as a result of the occupation of the Japanese army before and during the Second World War, so Russia is fighting over the Kuril Islands, with Korea⁶, and with China around the island of Taiwan.

Like in the case of China, high dependence on energy is Japan's biggest vulnerability. Japan is indifferent to the smallest trade disturbances and is also burdened by the demographic deficit. It is also regionally isolated and politically limited by its security dependence on its powerful ally (Sakan, 2012). Strong interest in stability in the Asian Pacific, the abandoning of the ambition of a dominant regional role, but also a strong endeavor to preserve the role of a leader in economic development, but also a growing involvement in global peace efforts, constitute the key determinations of Japan's foreign policy presence. The geopolitical identification of Japanese politics with American politics is also not called into question, as there is no other close associate in the region. Japan's strong ties with the United States are particularly important in the rise of China as the main competitor, as well as the still strong anti-Japanese views of the closest neighbors.

India as a country with a very burning history and a complex political structure, a population of over one billion and two hundred million inhabitants and expansive economic development, grows into a global geopolitical actor. Although the Central Country in South Asia, India has clear ambitions to be an actor in what is happening in the Asia Pacific, and in this way limits the position of other actors, and above all China. It is basically its East Look Policy doctrine that strengthens its influence on Southeast and East Asia in order to neutralize China's expansion in the region, as well as to intensify relations with states that are competitors of China and Japan (Avijucki, 2009). The main geopolitical tricks are its economic power, the status of nuclear power, and demographic potential. However, the many difficulties facing India, and above all its weak and divided internal social structure, as part of the colonial heritage, makes it difficult for it to deal effectively with the great

⁴ Moreuz La Peruz is a seafront between the Japanese island of Hokkaido and the Russian island of Sahalin that connects the Okhotsk and the Japanese Sea.

⁵ The goal of a joint Russian-Chinese maritime exercise that was implemented in the South China Sea in 2016 was to train two fleets in defense, rescue, submarine and island-based operations.

⁶ Some attempts to "drop the ball" around the Kuril Islands with Russia and achieve official peace will most likely not be favorably viewed or exploited by another force - the United States.

responsibility of the major states in international politics. Likewise, multi-decades animosity with China and Pakistan will, in the long run, have a negative impact on India's ability to influence geopolitics towards the South or the Indian Ocean.

SAFETY DISPUTES IN EASTERN CHINA SEA

The East China Sea is a semi-enclosed Pacific Ocean that is surrounded by China, Japan and South Korea⁷, and occupies a space that lies between the island of Kyushu and Ryukyu in the east, the Chinese island of Taiwan in the south and the continental part of China in the west. With the South China Sea it is connected through the Taiwan passage, with the Japanese Sea connected via the Korean passage, while on the north it borders the Yellow Sea.

Increasingly more competitive resources in the East China Sea, as well as the new security division of the borders, has contributed to the East China Sea becoming one of the most important security topics in the region. These existing disputes that are being activated, and new ones created, are used to introduce new and negative content in relations between countries in the region. There are particularly serious disputes between North Korea and the United States, as well as China and Japan, as the dominant economic and military forces in the Asia-Pacific region. The dynamics of these disputes, both their resolution and their intensification, will have a very significant impact on the level and quality of cooperation between the countries of the Asian Pacific and its security.

One of the main disputes in the Asia Pacific, both in the past and today, is the right to use the sea. The problem of States' attitude towards the sea surfaces and the rights to use them has prompted the adoption in 1982 of the United Nations of the Convention on the Law of the Sea, which entered into force in November 1994 (The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, UNCLOS)⁸. It is important to note that the United States participated in its creation, but it was not signed or ratified. The Convention defines a provision that regulates a safe "innocent passage" by the territorial sea, but the definition of "harmless passage" is lacking, which opens the space for a rational interpretation. Such undefinedness is one of the main problems in the relations between the United States and China, as both countries essentially differentiate this concept.⁹ China interprets the Maritime Convention so that the waters in which they have the right to determine the rules to foreign ships not only apply to a 22-kilometer-long belt, but also that these rules apply to all the water areas to the end of the so-called exclusive economic zone, totaling around 415 kilometers of restricted access (Senhua, 2013). For the United States, the focus is on freedom of navigation and freedom of flight, regardless of the exclusive economic belt or the territorial sea where the Chinese only have exclusive exploitation rights.

Disputes in the East China Sea mainly include three sides, namely China, Japan and South Korea. Disputes between China and South Korea are disputes over the division

⁷ The surface of the East China Sea is about 1,250,000 km²

⁸ The Maritime Convention of the UNO defined the starting line, inland waters, territorial waters, the external sea, the exclusive economic belt, the epicontinental belt, the open sea, etc.

⁹ According to the Chinese understanding, other countries' ships to enter the Chinese territorial sea must have the permission of the Chinese authorities. Unlike China, the United States believes that all ships, including military ships, have the right to "harmless" passage without reporting to the coastal country.

of the exclusive economic belt. It is mainly located on the Yellow Sea, and partly in the East China Sea. The most serious problem in the dispute between China and South Korea is the disagreement over the Sujan Rocks on which South Korea began to build plants, and basically the dilemma is whether the Sujan Ridge, the Ridge or the island is a Sujan¹⁰. The problem that also burdens the relations between China and South Korea is the Fisheries Agreement between Japan and South Korea signed by these two countries without the consent of China. The essence of the problem is that a part of the common marine space for the exploitation of Japan and South Korea, as defined by the agreement, is part of the Chinese exclusive economic belt.

A particularly potentially explosive problem is the militarization of North Korea and its pronounced animosity in relation to South Korea, the United States and Japan, as well as the fact that it seizes the bulk of its wealth in an effort to become a military force with a nuclear program as a precondition for its own security. In the light of the crisis that escalated over nuclear tests and the launch of Pyongyang's ballistic missiles, the US has sent several aircraft carriers to the region, leaving the crisis in the area unpredictable.

Disputes between China and Japan are much more intense and more coincidental. Dominating disputes over sovereignty over the small island of Senkakau (the Chinese name Diaoyu) and dividing the exclusive economic belt into the East China Sea. The difficult historical heritage marked by strong hostilities from the end of the 19th century up to the occupation of Japan in the Second World War has left a strong impact on the relations between the two countries to this day. Therefore, these disputes have much deeper significance and accumulate great potential for strong rivalry and mutual confrontation between China and Japan. The uninhabited islands of Senkakau (Huangvei, Civei, Nansiao and Beisiao) are located half way between the western Chinese coast (about 240 nautical miles) and the Japanese island of Okinawa in the north east of the East China Sea, and much of the estimated reserves of oil and gas are in their vicinity. Considering that the exclusive economic zone extends exactly 200 nautical miles from territorial waters, then it is clear why no party is absent from the right to claim the rights to these islands (Senhua, 2013).

Otherwise, the islands, since the sixteenth century and the rule of the Ming dynasty until the end of the nineteenth century were under the protection of the Chinese state when Japan annexed them in 1895 after the victory in the Chinese-Japanese War. According to the Cairo Declaration of December 1943, all Chinese territories that Japan won including Manchuria should be returned to China. By provisions of the Potsdam Declaration of July 1945, the territory of Japan is defined without the island of Senkaku. The San Francisco Treaty, which was signed without the consent of China and the Soviet Union, gave the United States the custody and supervision of all the islands of Ryukyu, including the Senkaka Islands in the Pakistani island of Okinawa. After that, the United States signed an agreement with Japan in 1971 and restored Japan's jurisdiction over the islands of Ryukyu, but the Senkaka Islands were also included in this agreement, stressing that they have only returned Japan to jurisdiction over disputed islands, but not sovereignty over them. The US Senate, at the end of 2012, announces an additional explanation stating that, in relation to the Senkaka Islands, Article 5 of the Agreement on Mutual Cooperation and

¹⁰ In 2001, the South Korean Institute of Geography called the Sujan Ridge as Leodo, which means the island, which opens up the possibility of defining the division of the exclusive economic belt more favorably for its own interests and exploring the resources of the East China Sea.

Security between the United States and Japan, which implies a joint defense, is applicable. Such a US position has strained relations between China and Japan in the long run.

The great significance of these islands for the security of the entire region stems from the fact that the islands of Senkaku are at the key point of passage between China and Japan. This fact is even more important for China, bearing in mind the stance of uniting with Taiwan and the rise of its interests in the Western Pacific as the American ocean. With this kind of strategy, the US is trying to control islands of Senkaku via Japan and to remove China from the possibility of unification with Taiwan, to separate it from the Pacific and prevent its takeover of the control over the East and South China Sea. Such a strategy, which is limited to restricting China's access to the Pacific, basically should mean the strategic isolation of China and a significant retrenchment of its power.

In economic terms, the region around the island of Senkaku has huge reserves of oil¹¹, gas and other raw materials. It is estimated that there are between 60 and 170 billion barrels of oil and hundreds of billions of cubic meters of gas in the region. In addition, the East China Sea is rich in fish. The issue of sovereignty is particularly important from the point of view of economic interests, and from the China's standing point, this is linked to great security and geopolitical problems. All of this is triggering a serious dispute between China and Japan, regarding the division of the "exclusive economic belt" into the East China Sea. China and Japan are overseas neighbors, and both sides are trying to protect their interests at sea as much as possible, so it is normal to have big differences in views. In this context, the division of the exclusive economic belt¹² between China and Japan remains a long-standing dispute over the East China Sea, the essence of which is primarily economic interests¹³.

The American Strategy for Reduction of Economic Political and Military Power of China implies tries to include Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam and South Korea into these efforts. Hence, at the top of the list of Chinese-American disagreements is Taiwan whose fate burdens the relations of the two great powers for more than six decades. From China's point of view, the basis for resolving this problem is Taiwan's attachment to China, which would lose Japan's current significance, while reducing the pressure on the US to increase overall Chinese security. Unification according to the Hong Kong model - one country and two systems is not very likely because Taiwan's identity is in opposition to Chinese, given that it is shaped by the multiple influences of many colonial and power, starting with the Dutch, Portuguese, French, English, Spanish, so the island was never attached to the Chinese Empire (Avijucki,2009).

China is unequivocal in its intention to restore Taiwan to its full sovereignty, emphasizing that it is ready to use force if peaceful enlistment would be impossible. Taiwan's strategic position and control over it, as well as control of the island's first chain opens the way to the Japanese naval routes and endangers US strategic positions. China counts on Taiwan's independence scenario and eventual US military intervention. Mov-

¹¹ It is estimated that the region has reserves of 1095 billion barrels of crude oil, which is similar to the amount of crude oil reserves held by Iraq.

¹² According to the provisions of the Convention on the Law of the Sea, the width of the exclusive economic belt is 200 nautical miles. The width of the East China Sea between China and Japan ranges between 170 and 360 nautical miles, which means there is an overlap of the economic belt throughout the area. The main problem of this dispute is the definition of the epicontinental belt.

¹³ According to the UN, oil and gas reserves in the East China Sea amount to about 7.7 billion tons and are sufficient to provide China with energy independence in the next 80 years, and Japan 100 years.

ing the US's geopolitical focus to the Asian Pacific has further worried China. The solution is not nearly as likely as the United States will not allow Taiwan to leave China, and China still has no power or will not get the credibility gained in recent decades to hurt and resolve the Taiwan case by force, so they will test each other for so long. America will continue to sell weapons to Taiwan in the future.

Disagreements in the relations between Russia and Japan concern the Kuril Islands. These islands are only a few miles away from the territory of Japan, and Russia took control of them after the Second World War. Japan seeks to restore sovereignty over them and in these efforts has the support of the United States, which does not include them in the US-Japan defense contract. Russia is ready to make certain concessions and return two of the five islands to Japan, but the shift in the geopolitical focus of the United States to the Asian Pacific imposed a heightened interest of Russia in that area, which complicated the resolution of the Kuril Islands issue.

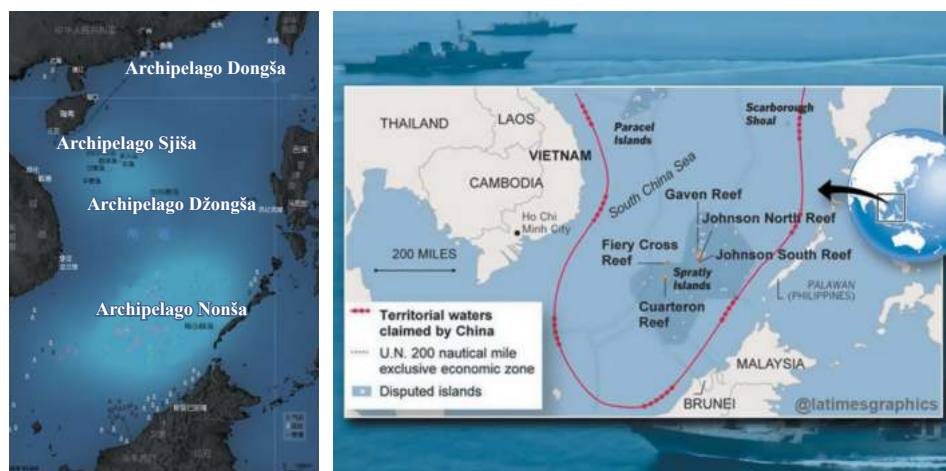
SAFETY DISPUTES IN SOUTH CHINA SEA

The South China Sea extends from Singapore and the Malay Pass to the Taiwan Strait. It has an area of about 3,500,000 km² and has more than 200 islands and cliffs that make up four archipelagos. The strategic position and wealth of resources make the South China Sea an object of interest of a large number of countries making it a geopolitical hotspot of alliances, frequent rivalries and territorial demands make it a key feature of the South China Sea's milieu. China, Taiwan, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam are coming to the shores of the South China Sea. The South China Sea has enormous resources, including oil, gas, and is extremely rich in fish. It is located on the main road linking the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Due to the volume of transport that takes place across its waters, the South China Sea is the second most prolific maritime corridor in the world, and is considered the throat of the world maritime route between the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean.

China wants to establish friendly relations with the countries of the region both because of the importance of the region for its economic development and as an important condition for its stability and security. China has had a long history of relations with these countries and seeks to strengthen its influence and intensify economic relations.

As for designing their own economic and military power, the United States has a strong interest in building strong relationships with states in the South China Sea region in support of the US-led international order, and thus creating the Asia Pacific Order. In this way, it will be easier to respond to the challenges of the emergence of a new great power, so that they can more easily oppose Islamic extremism and, in particular, control strategic points, but also resources and markets. For other countries, the South China Sea is a condition of economic development, but a question of sovereignty and security. The Chinese threat indicates their interest in the presence of the US and the balance in relation to China, but also the ability to become the instrument of their competition, or to get as much of this competition as possible to strike a balance in relation to the influence of the US and China. The dynamics of the South China Sea are affected by frequent changes in the narrative, or the unclear position of the conflicted sides.

The value of the starting position, but the resource wealth was intensified by territorial disputes, and the most prominent spatial dispute is the triangle of the islands of Sparti, Paracel and the Scarborough islets.



Picture No. 2 Four archipelagos in the South China Sea (left Chinese, right English names)

China is entitled to almost 70% of the maritime space, including waters considered by others as free for international traffic and thousands of miles away from its coast, and close to countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines and Brunei. In 1958 China defined the Dongzha (Pratas), Nanas (Spartel), Sich (Paracel), and Jongsha (Skarborou pliak) as the “line of 9 dashes” as their territory, as well as the sea between them and the land part of their territory, and confirmed legal status of sovereignty and jurisdiction. The legal interpretation of the line 9 of the dash from the point of view of the Convention on the Rights of the Sea is complex. The Chinese believe that on the basis of the “line 9 dashes” (the red line in the right picture above) the crags, reefs and islands inside it are led as a Chinese territory and China has sovereignty in that area, while other countries are free to navigate, fly over, lay down submarine cables and pipeline, etc. Also, all the rest of the sea beyond the territorial sea around the island are in the Chinese exclusive economic belt (Senhua, 2013). The Chinese position emphasizes that the Convention does not affect the restriction of territory and sovereignty so that it can not be used to solve the problem related to territory and sovereignty. Consequently, the Convention should not be the basis for any violation of Chinese sovereignty and its interests in the South China Sea.

With the discovery of oil and gas and mineral deposits in the South China Sea, the coastal countries of the South China Sea have been pushing for the establishment of their own authority in that area, and they found the basis for the Sea Confederation. In addition to China, which claims to have historical rights and the contested islands inseparable from its territory, its interests have been confirmed by Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines and Vietnam, claiming the right to 20 nautical miles of the economic belt, with the rivalry particularly pronounced in relation to the island of the Paracel Archipelago and Sparti.

Arhipelag Pratas (Dongsha) is the central archipelago in the South China Sea. It is located east of Jongsjung, 340 km from Honkong city. It is considered as an archipela-

go, but almost all islands are below the sea level except the island of Huangjiang. The archipelago is located on the main transport route between China, Japan and Singapore. The dispute at the Pratas Archipelago is taking place between China and the Philippines, as both countries want control over the island of Huangjiang. After many unsuccessful attempts by the Philippines to gain control over the island of Huangjiang, China made full control over it in 2012. The Paracel Archipelago (in the Chinese Siege) possesses about 130 different sea reefs, but only about 30 of them are real islands that occupy a space of about 15,000 km². China is in dispute with them, which are mainly effectively controlled by Vietnam. After withdrawing Taiwan's forces, Vietnam has deployed its military forces to this archipelago. This was the reason for the war in 1974 between China and South Vietnam in which China won, after which it regained full control of the archipelago's aquarium. In 2012, Vietnam passed the Law on the Sea in which this Archipelago and the Spratli Archipelago (Nansha) are under Vietnam's jurisdiction and sovereignty. In response, China establishes official authority, so that the city of Jongsjing (Paracel archipelago) forms the city as a political, military and cultural center, and in the next few years an airport is built on the island.

Archipelago Spratli is the closest and largest archipelago with the most islands and cliffs in the South China Sea. China's sovereignty over the archipelago. It contains more than 30 thousand islands, cliffs, canyons and only about 50 of them can be considered as islands. In this archipelago, the situation is most complicated due to emerging disputes over sovereignty, and problems arise from the discovery of oil and gas. This factor initiated the beginning of the struggle for conquering the islands and ridge in that area. In 1988, China also used force in the struggle for the islands of this archipelago. The current situation is that Vietnam has 29 islands, China 6, Taiwan 2, Philippines 9, Malaysia 5, Brunei 1 (without military presence), while Indonesia is interested in a part of the exclusive economic belt without sovereignty (Lai, 2013).

At the same time, China strives to exercise full control over the South China Sea and resolve territorial disputes with its neighbors to prevent the inclusion of the United States in the settlement of these disputes, believing that in this way they are encouraging its neighbors, as supported by the Philippines in 1994, stressing that their defense contract also includes Philippine demands in the South China Sea. The US warns that the modernization of the Chinese army is undermining the existing balance and free navigation, supporting the territorial requirements of Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia. The energy wealth of the South China Sea is also a dominant source of disagreement and rivalry. In relation to the oil and gas reserves in the East China Sea, the Yellow Sea, the South China Sea has the highest potential.

It is estimated that the South China Sea has roughly 35 billion tonnes of oil and gas, which is 15% of the world's reserves. In the area within the "line 9 dashes", there are 16 basins with oil and gas in which, according to estimates, there are more than 45 billion tons of oil and 8 trillion cubic meters of gas¹⁴. In addition, the seabed is rich in metal deposits.

By finding the hydrocarbons in the South China Sea in the 1970s, as well as by defining the exclusive economic belt at the UN Conference on the Right to the Sea, the countries around the South China Sea began to show their interest in the "exclusive eco-

¹⁴ There are different estimates - according to the US Geological Survey, oil reserves are 28 billion tons

conomic belt”¹⁵. On several occasions during 1997, China conducted surveys, but did not end them due to interference from the Vietnamese side. The exploitation of these energy resources is carried out in part in the deep sea. Due to technical and technological restrictions this exploitation is in some cases not possible. In the case of the South China Sea, 70% of hydrocarbon reserves are located in the deep sea.

Although at first glance the impression is that the South China Sea is a closed type, it is connected with other seas in different directions in various directions, and is therefore known as the “Far East crossroads”. Due to its important role in maritime communication, the South China Sea is the second largest maritime corridor after the Mediterranean Sea. In the north, the South China Sea is connected with the East China Sea through the Taiwanese Strait, located between the Chinese province of Fuyang and Taiwan. The maritime communication of Northeast Asia with Southeast Asia and further towards the Indian Ocean, is mainly taking place through this bridge. In the northeast, the South China Sea is connected to the Pacific via the Basha Channel located between the island of Taiwan and the Philippines. The communication between Singapore, Jakarta and Manila with other southeast countries to the Far East, and from Hong Kong to Hawaii and America are mostly connected through this channel. Through this channel, most of the oil and other raw materials imported from the Middle East, Africa and Southeast Asia for Japan are transported, and also the main passage of the Russian Pacific Fleet. Hence, it is considered as a channel that would be heavily controlled and blocked in the eventual conflict.

In the east, the southern China Sea is connected with the Sulu Sea through the Mindoro Bridge. This bridge is the main navigable route between the Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea. In the south, the South China Sea is connected with the Javanese Sea through the Karimata Strait, which is the main maritime route between Southeast Asia and Australia. In the southwest, the South China Sea is connected to the Indian Ocean via the Malay Passage, considered one of the world’s most important maritime corridors connecting the Pacific to the Indian Ocean. It is the seafront with the world’s biggest traffic congestion, because it is estimated that between 20% and 25% of the world’s global maritime trade is passing through that strait. Therefore, the Malaysian passage is considered a “line of life” for the economies of the countries in the surrounding of these seas.

At the same time, when it comes to security, one of the most sensitive points in the Asian Pacific is the so-called “Malay dilemma”. Namely, this is a pronounced security threat that is abundant in the Malaysian passage¹⁶, the most pronounced piracy and terrorism. Six out of ten pirate hijackings that occur in the world occur in this area¹⁷, or every 4 to 5 days per one. Today’s pirates in the Malaysian passage have modern weapons and modern equipment, as well as a scattered intelligence network across the ports of Southeast Asia. Likewise, Malaysia, Indonesia and the southern part of Fipipina are regions with the Islamic population, and the radicalization of Islam has accelerated the rise

¹⁵ In the 1990s, the countries around the South China Sea signed contracts with Western companies that possess technology and funds for joint exploitation of energy resources in the South China Sea. The lack of technology and financial resources is the reason why this exploitation does not do it alone, but also the issue of Chinese sovereignty and the risks it carries with it.

¹⁶ The Malay Pass is one of the most important maritime corridors connecting the Pacific Ocean to the Indian Ocean. Between 20% and 25% of the world’s global maritime trade passes the team with the sea

¹⁷ According to the analysis, economic losses of one year due to piracy in Southeast Asia amount to over \$ 25 billion.

and activity of Islamic extremist groups. Their association with bearers of Islamic terrorism and extremism (Al Qaeda, Islamic State / DAE) enables the coordination of their activities and the conduct of coordinated terrorist attacks in the Indochina area. The expansion of the territory and the increase in the number of objects of attack make it difficult to succeed, especially if it is known that the military - police forces of the countries of the Malay Strait (except Singapore) are weak and insufficient (mainly about relatively weak naval formations).

CONCLUSION

Significant changes that have taken place in recent years in contemporary international politics, as well as the increasing importance of energy and mineral resources and communication directions, have strongly influenced the growth of the geopolitical and geostrategic importance of the Asia Pacific. The enormous reserves of oil and gas, the highest concentration of human resources, as well as the high technological achievements influence the Asia Pacific region, becoming one of the most powerful drivers of the development and progress of the modern world. Such a unique position of the Asian Pacific has concentrated on the increasing interest of international politics in that region, thereby increasing the status of the gravity center of global power and economic dynamism.

China's revitalization is the main change in power relations and global geopolitical patterns, as it is also certain that the Eurocentric course of the development of the world with Western civilizational discourse is dominant, undoubtedly in defense, expanding spaces for a stronger global impact of emerging global actors from the East. In this sense, the rise of China is not only the usual competition of great powers, but it is a titanic change of world power that traditionally leads to changes in world leadership, as well as to political, economic, security and cultural changes in the international system. The team gets the importance of the view that the emergence of a new force has always been accompanied by tensions through history.

The rise of China to the ranking of the global power and, in this regard, the encouragement of the shift in the US's foreign policy focus, places the Pacific Ocean at the center of modern reliance, as well as the importance and strategic positioning in the Asia-Pacific region. The Impact of These Changes and the peculiarity of geopolitics and geostrategy of this area is intensified by the Chinese-American competition, in which the issues of demarcation, navigation and maritime control, as well as alliances in that part of the world are intensified. At the same time, these processes have attracted the interest of other important international actors of the Asia Pacific, primarily Russia, India and Japan, for the direction and dynamics of change in that part of the world. Russia, which, due to the conflicts with Europe and the United States over Ukraine, has definitely pushed one of its poles of interest to this region, and its increasingly intensified bilateral co-operation with China, including increasingly integrated security, especially military content, suggests that serious attempts at creating the second half of power and multipolar international politics in this part of the world. Also, India, which has a foreign policy focus on the Indian Ocean, now focuses its geopolitical focus on the Asia Pacific, and today's efforts to become more and more involved in the geopolitics of the Asia Pacific are recognizable today.

The return of classical geopolitics and the bid for the strategic positioning of the US and China, their diametrically opposite views on the exclusive economic zone and the security of navigation and territorial delineation, convincingly suggest an increase in conflict potential in their relations and the inevitability of their confrontation in the future. Intensive competition in a wide range of interests with its complexity is difficult to control, with strong implications not only for stability and security in the region, complicating peace prospects. Maritime strategic positioning, and for these needs, the development of the monarchy, the militarization of the South China Sea, and the development of the armament and navy industry are also inevitable strangleholds that compound the spectrum of security challenges. The worsening of the nuclear-weapon-related program and the North Korean ballistic missile tests and the strong concentration of US war effects near the Korean Peninsula is a particularly dangerous form of security threat in that area. Environmental problems and natural disasters and the pronounced dangers of Islamic extremism, complement the destructive potential that threatens the security of the Asian Pacific.

China, whose power capacities gain impressive reach, has a natural tendency to demonstrate the tendency to consolidate its external relations and interests. It is known that power does not only change people but also states, and an emphasized military positioning in the Asian-Pacific region of China has unambiguous ambition to secure its position on the East China and South China Sea as a space that has multiple significance for its further economic drive, but for its better positioning as a global actor in the Pacific Ocean. In addition, territorial integrity, in addition to national unity, is considered to be a fundamental national interest.

There is no doubt that the US role in this area has been put to the test, both due to the approaching of Russia and China, and also because of the changing attitude of the countries of the Asian Pacific towards American leadership in the Asian Pacific. Today it is quite clear that the United States will no longer be able to impose its demands from the position of force so far, because it is no longer possible to ignore the economic and geopolitical power of China. Likewise, without China, Japan and India, it is hard to expect that the United States can decisively shape the economic future of Asia. If it is added to intensify the danger of its direct confrontation with Russia, and that in the part of reviving classical cold-war perception in their relations, then quite surely the geopolitical power of the United States loses its superiority. Relations between China and the United States are the backbone of relations in the Asian Pacific, and they will the strongest impact on the stability and security of the region, and all other relations are and remain the product of that relationship. This is particularly important given the heterogeneity of the countries of the Pacific, their mutual rivalries and alliances with one of the leading powers and their calculating policies based on this, which further emphasizes the complexity of the relationship in that area. It is to be expected that all countries that are neutral, that are equally dependent on both China and the United States, will maintain diplomatic balance carefully by avoiding conflict, concluding that they can achieve their interests indirectly by cooperating with China or the United States and conditioning their humble position. However, a serious problem may be the grouping of small countries that have direct interests in the South China Sea against China. If countries outside of that space such as the United States, Japan and India join, then security problems in the South China Sea become even more pronounced and dangerous to world peace.

All this makes relations in the Asia Pacific region very complicated, often vague and unbalanced and potentially possible triggers of various conflicts whose implications would far outweigh regional frameworks. The region of enormous strategic importance, which is at the same time a multiple unstable region, is even gaining in importance, bearing in mind the new US administration that announces the intensification of the US competition with China as its main competitor. The belief that the fate of America is determined in the Pacific rather than the Atlantic is in favor of such long-term projections that put the Asian Pacific at the very top of security challenges in the world.

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