

GEOSTRATEGIC CHANGES IN SOUTH EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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Abstract

Although the US military budget is close to the astronomical amount of 1000 billion USD; the US considers that the biggest threat is not represented by terrorism, but by Russia and China – the main concern being worried especially by the scientific and technological ascension of China.

In time, the power poles could move to East Asia and South East Asia.

Therefore, the new geopolitical context will significantly depend on the state that will be able to dominate the vast space of South East Asia, resulting in a worldwide strong influence.

Keywords: *diplomacy, geostrategy, strategic routes, energy, mineral resources, rivalry, security, military and economic power.*

In his work *The Great Chess Board...*, Zbigniew Brzezinski (1997) stated his opinion that the USA has to control Eurasia in order to maintain its long-lasting power. According to him, Washington is going to need „a new Pearl Harbour” in order for the population to accept an American military super-power.

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That is the reason why Brzezinski was in favour of the idea of a closely connected Euro-Atlantic community, namely the USA - the EU, as Russian Federation and China are the main opponents of the US.¹

A stable and prosperous Europe is an essential condition for building a democratic and cooperative Eurasia.

In the meantime, geopolitical changes have started to occur in South-East Asia and the Pacific Ocean under the circumstances of evermore present „reproaches” exchanged between the USA and the EU.

This state of facts that has been going on for several months has determined the EU to already look for other partners following the acute lack of agreement between the EU and the USA, respectively an agreement between European Union and Japan, therefore creating an area of free exchange (an extremely significant fact). This meant over 30% of World GDP and it was considered a historical event leading to multiple changes in world politics, especially in South-East Asia and the Pacific.

On global level, the USA controls the main naval routes, having operative military task forces in the Pacific Ocean, the Arctic Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean, too, but still being involved in supremacy disputes over the commercial routes.

Russia is trying to dominate the strategic supply routes for hydrocarbures going to the EU, China and Japan, while Russia is the world leader in this domain, holding 60% of world resources.

The competing states in South-East Asia are the following: China, Japan, Russia, the USA, India etc.

Beijing administration is trying to rule over the East and South China Seas, already building there two important standing naval groups and working on a third one of the total of four anticipated in the end.

It is also important to make a detailed analysis of the task forces grouped in the most crowded area of the world with respect to the population, to the amount of mineral resources more and more sought after, as well as current alliances.

Thus, the Ukrainian crisis, the economic, commercial, financial sanctions imposed by the USA and the EU on Russia, in addition to an

¹ Colectiv, *Istorie și diplomație secretă*, Editura Top Form, București, 2017, p. 10.

unprecedented demand for energy made by China have all led to China's rapprochement to the Russian Federation.

The two states mentioned above signed the Sino-Russian Treaty of Friendship - „Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation”, having significant implications at global level.

Some of the key points designing the relations between the two countries were the following:

- the common border of 4,300 km must be secure;
- China is on the first position in the world with a GDP of 20,890,740 billion dollars and the USA on the second position, with a GDP of 18,740,200 billion dollars;
- the fast and constant pace of economic growth besides the demographic factor of having almost 1.4 billion inhabitants and being the world's first economic power and the biggest importer of energy in the world led to an acute need for raw materials, especially from Russia, the world's richest country in this respect;
- the increasingly cordial relations between the two states also represents a natural need for complementariness, including the need to stand against American supremacy;
- it is to be noticed that China did not humiliate Russia in any way after the breaking up of the USSR in 1991;
- Shanghai Cooperation Organization comprises eight states among which: Russia, China, India, Pakistan etc., holding over half of world's population.

The convergence of goals of the two large regional powers, China and Russia, is beneficial to both of them and could more easily the US hegemony.

Actually, China has manifested its ambitions of multilateral development starting with Deng age, not only in economy, but also and especially with ambitious projects in science and technology, aiming to become a world leader with high-class education.

Ever since 1992, Russia has become the most important armament exporting country to China, including all categories of weapons.

Certainly, China would like to benefit from Russia's help in becoming a full-fledged member of the Arctic region, at present merely holding the status of observer, as compared to the eight Arctic states: Russia, USA, Canada, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Sweden, Finland.

China aims to become a full member taking into consideration the political and economic interests of Russia in the Arctic: strategic bases of mineral resources, shorter maritime route, huge quantities of raw materials in the area, consisting especially of oil and gas etc.

An important aspect to be noticed is that the alliance between the two powers in the region, China and Russia, is especially important in the domain of energy, mineral resources and so on and may soon lead to a multi-polar confrontation.

The analysis of existing rivalries and smouldering conflicts, excessive weapon proliferation, including the weapons of mass destruction in states like China, India, Pakistan, Russia, North Korea, as well as the constant threat of using them generates a state of uncertainty in the most populated area in the world.

The situation in the Russian Far East also has to be analyzed in the context of the continuous decrease of Russian population in this region, which is rich in resources, up to only 6-7 million Russians, given the 120 million Chinese people living in the vicinity of Amur region and other 6-8 million Chinese people working in the area.

Actually, in China there are a few millions of unemployed people that wander from one province into another in search for labour.

In that part of Asia, huge as surface and amount of population, the development could have a positive influence upon everything.

The multiple relations China – Japan, China – Russia, China – India, may play a particularly important part in the area and even in the world as such, also taking into consideration the demographic growth in India that will exceed that in China and the significant economic growth.

The South-East Asia may be influenced more by the relation between China and Russia, two regional powers, Russia taking on the role of super-power being at the same time the wealthiest country in the world in mineral resources.

China, with its largest GDP in the world and its over three trillion dollar debts to cash in from the USA really has a say in the diplomacy in the area and the rest of the world.

Certainly, China has its own share of shortcomings: the larger necessity of energetic resources, over 60% in the Middle East and Russia, the serious issues with environment degradation, the regional inequality etc.

Yet, China is a provider of regional and global security as it is highly developed, including from the military point of view.

Japan has a GDP that places it on the third place after China and India, having a high degree of development with limited resources and an exceptional system of education.

China and Pakistan have hostile relations and the same can be said about China and India, which is a nuclear power and also has remarkable demographic growth.

South Korea is economically developed and is situated among large, powerful states, at present being an ally of the USA and having decent relations with North Korea.

We may consider that a closer relation between the USA and China may solve a lot of the issues in the above-mentioned area.

Still, as China is the largest economic power and regional power is able to impose its claims which generates tension factors in the relations with the USA.

The failed states in Eastern Asia can be risk factors to regional and even global security, starting with North Korea, Bangladesh, Timor etc.

Furthermore, there are tensions in the area between China and Japan, and China and Taiwan.

The respective region, through its territorial, economic and natural resources dimensions, is part of this Asian space, quite sensitive for the security of the world.

Thus, China and India's economic as well as military growth in addition to the Russian Federation as military super-power complicate the geopolitical situation in the area. The perpetual US interests in this region completes the geopolitical picture.

China has also set as an important goal becoming world leader in science and innovation within 30 years.

Subsequently, Russia also allotted significant amounts of money of the Academy budget to other research institutions and universities, including for modernizing education, encouraging – since 2017 – young people to also study abroad at top universities in the USA, Germany, the Czech Republic, Great Britain, etc.

A remarkable aspect is the fact that, starting with 2016, the number of publications in China is on the second position after the USA.

At the same time, the US military expenditures are close to 1,000 billion dollars, taking into consideration that the largest threat is no longer terrorism, but rather Russia and China, and that the economic, scientific, and technological advance of China are serious reasons for concern.

„In time, the power poles may move towards East and South-East Asia. China is already acknowledged as a regional power and the Russian Federation hopes to dissociate Germany from the USA.”²

Global American strategy is also based on the preponderance of the American financial sector over business markets.

It is equally true that the USA will still continue to benefit in the future too from huge resources, a certain capacity to adapt to the changing world, dominating current technology, covering 20% of world GDP, the first place in innovation, research, education and especially an unequalled military power.

Even the USA considered that: „the real threat is not represented by China or the Islam’s ascension, but rather by our weakness and ignorance fuelling it.”³

The new geo-political context is thus created that whoever is going to dominate the huge area in South-East Asia will have a huge influence on the whole world.

We may consider that after the Atlantic Ocean in the 19th century, in the 21st century, the Pacific Ocean will be on the first position, while China, a regional power from the military and economic points of view, has become an economic global leader and overcame the USA.

² Idem, pct. 1, p. 25.

³ Idem, pct. 1, p. 27.

They are accompanied by India, Japan and South Korea, deeming it safe to anticipate an Asian century of power and influence.



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