

Regional security in Asia Pacific: US and China strategic balance

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Abstract. The article gives a review on military-political situation in Asia Pacific. In the light of the recent increasing role of Chinese economy in the region many political analysts consider this as a threat not just to the regional stability but also to the spheres of influence of other regional powers. The growth of China's military potential in the region can fold a new political configuration of security in the region – Pacific “Cold War” (“Cold War” in Asia-Pacific). The author analyzes the dynamics of military expenses of the key regional powers, revealing their quick military build-up, also made a conclusion on the importance of the case-study and possible scenarios in the region.

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Introduction

The modern political situation in Asia Pacific can be characterized by the dynamics of extremely high political processes and aimed for further transformation this vast region to a new center of global policy and economy in order to compete with Euro-Atlantic part of the world. The region can become a pivot for further civilization development. Diversification of international community interests towards Asia Pacific can significantly widen political-economical ties all over the world.

Most of the Asia-Pacific countries are currently focused on the implementation of crucial economic reforms in order to create favorable conditions for economic development on different levels – national, regional, global. The modern situation in the region is characterized by large-scale integration processes, accompanied by the formation and further strengthening of multilateral economic and political organizations (Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), political triangles “China-Japan-South Korea”, “Russia-India-China”).

Political and economic processes in the region are mainly determined by the U.S. influence and can be defined as an applicable object of economic and military forces. The fulcrum for the U.S. influence in Asia-Pacific is Forward Base Systems (FBS) represented by the United States Pacific Command (USPACOM), as well as bilateral alliances with Japan, Australia and South Korea. The U.S. policy in Asia-Pacific is aimed to eliminate existing barriers to their products and investments and prevention of further barriers. The U.S. government supports regional organizations such as ASEAN,

ARF, APEC, this support allows them to hold leading positions in the region [1]. In the modern conditions the U.S. political measures are practically exhausted. An enormous foreign debt to China and shift of significant volumes of industrial productions from the U.S. to China (based on expectations of cheap labor force) brought to job deficit and social tensions within the country. In this connection, the main instrument of countering China's rising should be political and diplomatic measures of deterrent character. The political aspiration of China in Asia Pacific is aimed to achieve a superpower status not just at the regional level but also at the global scale, through the active expansion of the national capital all over the region [2]. Traditionally, China's foreign policy is coherent and not associated with strict organizational obligations and mainly focused on achieving national interests foremost. Today China's rising geopolitical influence by military means can be projected beyond the mainland in order to protect its territorial waters [3].

The dynamics of military expenses growth.

Over the first decade of the 21st century the dynamics of growth of military expenditures among key actors of the region had indicated fast military build-up. The region is divided to:

- Military and political bilateral alliances with USA;
- Economic and political structure of ASEAN (+ other countries);
- Geographically not connected security structure of SCO (only with China);
- North Korea within the military alliance with China.

Over the past decade the U.S. enormous military expenditures have increased more than 2 times – from 301.697 billion dollars in 2000 to 661.049 billion dollars in 2009 [4]. According to the

Centre for Analysis of World Arms Trade just in 2010 Pentagon have spent almost 700 billion dollars. The current defense strategic guidance presented by the U.S. president Barack Obama on the 5th of January 2012 [5] proves the necessity to reduce Pentagon's expenditures for half a trillion dollars the next decade. Many experts believe that this new vision of the U.S. national defense is conditional to budgetary problems. The U.S. administration is pretty sure to reduce personnel of the U.S. army from 10 to 15% in the next decade. So these amendments to the U.S. defense budget reflect preparation for another "Cold War". If in the first "Cold War" the main antagonist was USSR, now the upcoming one will be directed against China's military-political bloc, this means that the U.S. government will not allow a creation of another new bloc with China in the region.

The last conception have declared a refusal from long-termed positioning of the U.S. army with possibility to conduct two wars simultaneously and the next goal of the U.S. defense administration – is to fight and deter, which means that the U.S. army will be able to participate just in one conflict, but capable to deter a conflict in another strategic direction. In line with this strategy the U.S. administration is planning to cooperate with coalition forces as long as possible. So in this connection one of the major goals – is to reduce ground forces, strengthen air forces and navy and by this to deter China, Iran or North Korea. The U.S. will shift the focus of their military presence from Middle East to Asia Pacific. And it's no doubt that China's rising has become the main state of concern for the US government. In this connection some experts suggest, "USA will ensure the possibility to react in different inaccessible parts of the world. USA will continue to use their superpower status in order to protect access to other regions and become a connecting link to the international system" [5]. Also, the U.S. administration will continue to increase their expenses for further development of new unmanned aircrafts, space military systems, scientific innovations and technology. The total amount of the last year budget expenditures is approximately 3.8 trillion dollars in comparison to the deficit of 1 trillion dollars [6].

In 7 years from 2002 to 2009 the People's Republic of China raised it's level in the world rates on armament expenditures from the 7th place to the 2nd [7]. Officially the growth of military expenses is extremely rapid – for 5 times in 10 years: from 21.473 billion dollars in 2000 to 100.425 billion dollars in 2009. According to the annual reports of the U.S. Defense ministry to the U.S. Congress China's military expenses amount is from 1.7 to 2.6 times higher than officially had been declared [8]. In particular, in 2004 the Stockholm International Peace

Research Institute (SIPRI) proved that China's official military expenses are mainly intended for financing of People's Liberation Army (PLA), but other expenses on technology and military studies are taken from other budget sources, such as: Fund for scientific researches, Fund for new productions' development. According to SIPRI's estimation China's real military expenses average exceeds twice the official figures. The same estimations have got the Center for strategic international studies (CSIS) [9]. The main flashpoint of tensions in Asia-Pacific is permanent confrontation of North and South Korea, the Taiwan issue, the problems with the Senkaku Islands, the Paracel Islands and the Spratly Islands. China has its national interests in all of the abovementioned zones. These conflict zones affect the geostrategic interests of different regional powers. So that other regional powers have to restrain China's expansionist activity.

The new era of arms race is underway in the Southeast Asia, which performs large-scale development programs of Air Forces, Air Defense, Navy and ground forces. The government of Japan despite of the natural disaster in March 2011 still continues to increase their military expenses. Over the last 10 years South Korea has increased military expenses for 2 times – from 13.8 billion dollars in 2000 to 24.059 billion dollars in 2010. Russian military expenses increased for 5 times in 10 years: from 9.635 billion dollars in 2000 to 53.33 billions in 2010 [9]. The Australian report in 2011 about the military situation in Asia-Pacific stresses their viewpoint on the danger from the Chinese weapons for U.S. aircraft carriers at a distance up to 1.200 miles from the coast of China. It is also argued "China puts ballistic and cruise missiles capable to destroy U.S. bases in Guam, Japan and elsewhere in a few hours."

The armament export and import

The world largest armament exporters are USA and Russia. According to SIPRI's research approximately 30% of world arms is American, 23-24% is of Russian export [10]. Traditionally Russian armament is one the key source to China's army (arms procurement share is 84%). But despite this fact military-scientific cooperation between two countries decreased to a level of 1990s. (Strategic partnership between Russia and China was declared in 1996). This fact reveals China's intentions for re-orientation to internal development of defense technologies [11].

In the next few years we should expect the process of reorientation on the basic provisions of China's national military-strategic doctrine, in line with already implemented course of PLA modernization with the main focus on strengthening of naval component. The report of The U.S. Defense ministry to US Congress presented that all these

changes in the PLA indicate the intention of China's military activity to neutralize the American military and technical presence in the Pacific Ocean [12]. But despite this fact a predominant part of the regional countries are the U.S. traditional partners:

- Mutual Defense Treaty between USA and Philippines (1951).
- ANZUS Security Treaty – Australia, New Zealand, USA (1952).
- Mutual Defense Treaty between USA and South Korea (1954).
- Treaty on Collective Defense in Southeast Asia between USA, France, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand and Philippines.
- Treaty on Mutual Cooperation and Security between USA and Japan (1960).

Nowadays, China is strengthening its positions in Myanmar, Indonesia, East Timor, Bangladesh, the Republic of Fiji and other countries of the region. According to the latest edition of "White papers of China's national defense" – one of the fundamental official policy documents making the military-strategic doctrine of the country, - the main threats and challenges to China's security along with international terrorism and proliferation of weapons mass-destruction are separatism and activities impeding China's reunification. This means Taiwan's joining to China and control over the disputable islands' territories in the South China Sea: the Paracel Islands, the Spratly Islands, the Senkaku Islands. The reunification of the country is one of the major tasks of national defense along with the prevention of armed subversive activity, saving social stability and protection of China's territorial waters. China considers Taiwan as a province and an inalienable part of China which has been separated from China since 1949 when KMT government of Jiang Jeishi (Chiang Kei-shek) fled there in the face of defeat by communist forces. Taiwan still controls one island that appertains to the mainland – Jinmen, which is part of Fujian Province. In Beijing the CCP Central Committee's Taiwan Work Office and State council's Taiwan Affairs Office handle matters dealing with Taiwan. China is adamantly opposed to independent or any quasi-state status of Taiwan and has alternated since the late 1970s between overtures for peaceful reunification and statements of resolution to forceful reclaim of Taiwan if necessary [13].

The military-strategic doctrine of China is aimed to counter a unipolar world order that can be established in the region. In the official statements China expresses readiness to take responsibility to protect the world and stability of other geopolitical challenges and threats. As well as the global threats mentioned in these statements, the main geopolitical challenge for China's government is the countries

pursuing the policy of "hegemony and power". This indirectly could indicate the U.S. and countries supporting the U.S foreign policy. But none of the official documents reveals references to any specific country. Many Chinese scholars emphasize this aspect as a lack of powerful enemies, which is replicable to the West Chinese military theory as a "dangerous" myth [3]. But in comparison to SIPRI's researches China's growing global presence means only necessity to increase participation in order to reveal national interest, which has become more active. In this connection, one of the most important manifestations of such a new trend is China's expanding role in UN peacekeeping activities [14]. Nevertheless, the military capabilities of the U.S. and its allies still one of the major blocs presented in Asia Pacific. The U.S. forces under USPACOM is one of the powerful groups in the region: approximately 300 000 US military personnel presented there. Asia Pacific definitely is prospective theatre for global missile defense systems' deployment. The CSIS evaluations [9] for strategic and tactical nuclear forces of US and China differs from the evaluation of US Ministry for Defense [15]. The figures presented in the last document are overstated. The amount of nuclear warheads is declined in comparison to the last 10 years – about 30 (mono-bloc missiles CSS-4, DF-31 and DF-31A). Theoretically, in case of war the first and second positioning areas of US national missile defense system (California, Alaska) can intercept and destroy saved warheads after the first counterforce strike and by this can neutralize potential retaliation of China.

In the short term prospective, some western analysts do not consider even the hypothetical possibility of an armed confrontation between the U.S. and China, so the relationship between these two countries is not the sort of a possible threat to the regional security. Strategic nuclear forces are characterized by a significant number of Chinese ballistic missiles of medium and short range, production of the weaponry which is not limited by any treaties, unlike the Treaty on the Elimination of medium-range and short-range missiles, concluded in 1998 between USA and Russia. But in comparison to these two countries, China has smaller nuclear potential and calls up world nuclear powers to eliminate nuclear weapons, proclaiming the non-proliferation problems to be resolved by legal means and in equitable manner, in order to make an access for non-nuclear countries

Nowadays, China calls upon world nuclear powers to the total elimination of nuclear weapons, while proclaiming that the problems of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons should be addressed legal and equitable manner that recognizes the

legitimate right of non-nuclear states access to peaceful use of nuclear technology [16].

Conclusion

The political and economic processes in Asia Pacific will be determined by the bilateral rivalry of USA and China. Due to the increasing importance of Asia-Pacific the military and political analysts consider region to the world economy the China's rising as a challenge to the U.S. security interests, not just in the region but also in a global level. The one of discomposing facts for many scholars is that China's official military data more reduced than it has been expected. Thus, US-China confrontation in the region can bring to a new political configuration in the regional security, where the military confrontation theatre will be presented in the territorial water spaces.

From Central Asia perspective, the analysis of such long-term scenarios is extremely important, as Chinese analysts see the Central Asian region as a potential reliable mainland in this confrontation. If these mechanisms of inclusive leadership fail to solve these problems, regional powers will likely pursue the politics of "balance-of-power", thus strengthening the trend toward a new Pacific Cold War.

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