

Asia's Problems Must be Solved by Asian Countries

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A series of recent events involving China, Japan and India allows us to revisit the theme of the growing influence of these three leading Asian countries on the nature of developments in the Indo-Pacific region.

This fact is of particular importance against the backdrop of the continuing decline of the US role in the world in general and in the region in particular. Which, incidentally, is in the national interest of the country. That is, the process is quite objective in nature and does not depend on political rhetoric about the “return” (to somewhere and for some reason) of the next American administration.

This is evidenced by its own statements about the rejection of scenarios of forceful intervention in internal political perturbations of other countries, about the continuation of the policy of the previous administration on the military withdrawal from Afghanistan and in general the reduction of the American military presence in the Greater Middle East.

As for the “return of America” to Europe, the problems arising from it can already be seen with the naked eye. For example, in connection with contradictory signals from Washington about the Nord Stream 2 project. For the price of the issue is not so much this project and the (pseudo) problem of the “Russian challenge” in general, but rather the relations with Germany, the leading European country. And, consequently, this “price” includes a very likely problematization of NATO, which is the main instrument of maintaining the military and political presence of the United States in Europe.

It is unlikely that the trade and economic (quite extensive) sphere of Euro-Atlantic relations will undergo significant changes. But this is a completely different format from what they had during the entire Cold War period.

So far, no such progress has been seen in US relations with its key Asian allies. Mainly because Asia is now the place where the principal geopolitical opponent of the United States is located, in the form of China. Therefore, efforts are being made to, first, strengthen the long-standing bilateral alliances here, and, second, to create something akin to a multilateral (Asian) counterpart of NATO in the IPR.

Japan remains a key US ally in the region, and Washington has given it an equally important

role in a (hypothetical) “Asian NATO”. The current forum-based QUAD of the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, whose first (video) [summit](#) was held on March 12 this year, is seen as a kind of haven for such a politico-military alliance.

Once again, we note that this event, too, did not dispel the dense fog that originally surrounded the prospect of a full-fledged multilateral military-political alliance with an anti-Chinese orientation in the region. Mainly because there is no more or less common perception of the PRC as a source of threat to national interests in Asian countries today. This is fundamentally different from the situation in Cold War Europe. Beijing still has problems of varying degrees of importance in its relations with almost all of its neighbors. This is mainly due to territorial disputes that have their origins in both relatively recent and rather distant history. This kind of problem can only be solved on the basis of the goodwill of the parties directly involved and is unlikely to be resolved within the framework of current international law.

This is illustrated by the zero significance of the [decision](#) of the Arbitration Court in The Hague in the summer of 2016 regarding China’s claims to ownership of 80-90% of the South China Sea. It has had no effect on the complex situation in the Southeast Asian subregion, but can be taken advantage of by some “problem solver” as a legal justification for the use of force here.

So far, the main (external, it is important to emphasize) “solver” in this regard is Washington. But lately some of the Europeans have [decided](#) to join the US for some reason. Which continues to amaze, for it is completely incomprehensible why Europeans are multiplying the number of their own problems by getting into the anthill (already going through turmoil) that is on the other side of the globe.

And there are no threats to their trade and economic ties with Southeast Asia, China, Japan, South Korea... That is, in the area in which postwar Europe so excelled and what accounts for its current standing in the international arena.

And in which postwar Japan was no less successful. However, its increasing presence in the IPR is not at all surprising. For Japan is an inseparable and one of the most important elements of the region.

Europe and the United States may well be present here, too. But rather in the role of guests (invited, which is important to emphasize), not as the hosts. Who are suffering from obviously inflated self-esteem, the consequence of which is their current ridiculous position as teachers in the field of “human rights”. However, they have been taking that stance for completely understandable political and practical purposes.

As for Japan, it could not be excluded from the IPR (and SEA) even if it wanted to. In this regard, the second (since 2015) Japan-Indonesia meeting in Tokyo on March 30 in the “2+2” format, that is, with the participation of foreign and defense ministers, was rather notable. Judging by the comments of its [results](#), the parties have found common ground on a wide range of issues.

Indonesia is one of the main countries of Southeast Asia and the ASEAN regional grouping, with the world’s leading players vying for influence. Without exception, all ASEAN members seek to move beyond the format of the objects of the game of “big players” and to position themselves in one way or another in relation to each of them without really “offending” any

of them. Since it's really more trouble than it's worth.

In this regard, the trip of Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi along the Tokyo-Beijing route looked quite natural. During her talks with her Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, the (no less broad) range of topics was [discussed](#): from cooperation in combating the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic to security issues in Southeast Asia.

There is a noteworthy recent trend in Chinese foreign policy aimed at reducing its notorious "assertiveness" while increasingly striving to develop mutually beneficial relations with its neighbors. Without this, both the success of China's key Belt and Road Initiative project and the extremely difficult role of the global power, whose interests go far beyond some local turmoil and conflicts, will be impossible.

In this context, it is difficult to overestimate the positive significance of stopping and possibly reversing one of the most serious conflicts in recent [decades](#) between China and India, that is, with one of the members of the regional strategic triangle identified above.

With Japan, the matters are much more complicated. Especially after the US-Japan "2+2" talks in mid-March, which will be followed up by a visit to the United States by Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga. Washington's [commitments](#) to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, recorded after the first event, were granted to Tokyo, of course, "for a reason". They could turn out to be chains, constraining Japan's freedom of maneuvering in the space of regional politics. As happened a few years ago, when the instrument of issuing such commitments was used by Washington in order to disrupt the process of building relations between Tokyo and Moscow.

However, a positive factor for Sino-Japanese relations remains the signing late last year (after years of negotiations) of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership with the [participation](#) of 15 IPR countries, chief among them China and Japan. Let us note, though, a negative aspect of the negotiation process on this topic, due to the withdrawal of India from it at the last moment.

No less important for Sino-Japanese relations may be the realization of Beijing's recently announced intention to join another Japanese-led regional association, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which includes 11 countries of the same IPR.

Once again, if the many regional problems are to be solved at all, it will only be with the growing participation of the three leading regional powers that make up the China-Japan-India regional strategic configuration. Helping its participants with advice and deeds could be done only at their own (joint) request.

There are nuances in the positions of each of them on the increasingly important situation in Myanmar, a Southeast Asian country and member of ASEAN. But none of the three mentioned are hysterical about the "crimes of the military junta," in contrast to the hysteria in which almost immediately and unanimously (after the [famous events](#) in this country) all the major Western capitals found themselves. Instead, the press of leading Asian countries is turning to the very complex history and current state of Myanmar in order to get to the bottom of what happened in that country on February 1 this year.

It would be very appropriate and timely for Asia to collectively address these capitals: "Guys

(and gals as well)! Forget the old colonial times and deal with your own current problems. You have just as many, and they are just as serious. And we'll deal with our own, this time without you."

Let us add to this (hypothetical) address by saying that Asia is forming its own "solvers" of regional problems.

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