

Sino-U.S. Rivalry in the Asia-Pacific: Declarations and Actual Policies

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Abstract

The article examines the growing confrontation between China and the United States in the Asia-Pacific, primarily in countries neighboring China. Based on an analysis of the political documents, motives, and real policies of both countries, the paper concludes that this confrontation will escalate in the coming years.

The U.S.'s position in this confrontation is determined by its general ideological approach to global development, according to which the very

existence of a large and growing state pursuing an independent foreign policy is a threat to American security, since it undermines U.S. “leadership” that ensures normal and progressive development of the world. China’s strategy is to strengthen its international status and regain its legitimate leading position, which it lost as a result of the “century of humiliation” in the second half of the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries.

In this situation, Russia needs to pursue a finely nuanced policy towards the regions involved in the U.S.-China confrontation, using a differentiated approach.

Keywords: China, U.S., struggle for leadership, security, Russia.

MOTIVES IN THE STRUGGLE FOR LEADERSHIP

When considering the struggle between the United States and China for influence in Asia, one should understand the fundamental difference in their underlying motives. The United States is fighting for leadership in Asia, as well as around the world, for ideological reasons. Washington believes that U.S. leadership in the world is a guarantee of its normal development. If this leadership is lost due to the emergence of a competing power, everything will go wrong globally. President Joe Biden’s foreword to the U.S. National Security Strategy, published in October 2022, says: “Around the world, the need for American leadership is as great as it has ever been. We are in the midst of a strategic competition to shape the future of the international order... In response, the United States will lead with our values, and we will work in lockstep with our allies and partners and with all those who share our interests. We will not leave our future vulnerable to the whims of those who do not share our vision for a world that is free, open, prosperous, and secure” (National Security Strategy, 2022, p. 2).

Biden reaffirmed this position during his meeting with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in Bali on November 14, 2022. He explained that Washington was going to compete vigorously with Beijing, strengthening both its own power and cooperating with allies and partners around the world (that is, in fact, surrounding China with a tight deterrent ring), but would not

bring things to the point of conflict. At the same time, the American president stressed that the two countries must “manage the competition responsibly” and “maintain open lines of communication.” Among the areas where the two sides could negotiate, Biden named climate change, global macroeconomic stability, debt relief, health security, and global food security (The White House, 2022a).

In this context, any threat to U.S. hegemony in any part of the world is seen as an existential threat to the U.S. itself, with morality and security being inextricably intertwined. The loss of geopolitical leadership creates a threat to U.S. security and at the same time undermines the highest “values” that the U.S. offers to the world. Conversely, the undermining of “values” challenges U.S. leadership, which, in turn, undermines American security. The balance between values and geopolitics, and the specific content of these values differ for Democrats and Republicans or individual groups of the ruling elite, but in general there is a consensus in Washington that they are most closely interconnected with each other.

In China, the situation is different. The Chinese have set the goal of turning China into “a great modern socialist country that leads¹ the world in terms of composite national strength and international influence by the middle of the century” (State Council, 2022). Unlike the openly anti-Chinese policy declared by the U.S., this strategy does not directly aim to fight the United States or anyone else, but it assumes an anti-American character all the same since Beijing has to counteract U.S. efforts to contain China.

According to the official Chinese report on the Bali meeting, Xi Jinping stressed quite clearly that China had never sought to change the existing world order, did not interfere in the internal affairs of the United States, and had no intention of challenging it, let alone replace it as a world leader. At the same time, the Chinese leader made it clear that he expected a similar approach from Washington, attaching great importance to Biden’s repeated assurances that he did not seek

¹ Unlike the U.S., China understands a “leading” country not as a monopoly leader who guarantees normal development of others, but as one of the advanced and most influential countries in the world that sets an example for others to follow.

to provoke a “new Cold War,” change China’s political structure, strengthen alliances against China, support “Taiwan’s independence” or start a direct conflict with China (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022a).

China’s position is growing stronger as if all by itself as its foreign economic influence increases due to rapid economic growth, military modernization and buildup, and increasingly active security policy. The recent strengthening of this influence is viewed by the United States as an existential challenge to its own value-power hegemony. As a result, China, subjected to harsh pressure since Donald Trump’s presidency, has to respond. This situation is sometimes perceived in the world as a struggle for leadership.

So at the heart of the current confrontation between the United States and China lies the latter’s rapid rise, quite unexpected for the U.S. which sees it through the lens of its ideology of global leadership as the only possible form of its existence. It has particularly manifested itself in the American theory of China’s “deception.” According to this theory, by starting cooperation with Beijing, back during Richard Nixon’s presidency, Washington hoped that it would change China, make its society more like the Western one, and its foreign policy more pro-American. Instead, Beijing used this cooperation to strengthen its own country, but did not pursue pro-American policies, thus deceiving the expectations of American strategists.

This idea was most clearly stated by Mike Pompeo, Secretary of State in the Trump administration, who said: “Because for a long time, Republicans, Democrats, leaders all across academia, institutions, commercial space thought that by trading and engaging with China, that the Chinese Communist Party would reform itself, it would loosen up, it would embrace economic and political freedom, and it would present less risk to freedom around the world. But instead, that’s not what we got. Instead, the Chinese communists used the wealth that was created by this to tighten their grip on power, their grip on power over the Chinese people, and to build a high-tech repressive state like the world has never seen” (Pompeo, 2020a).

Needless to say, the theory of “deception” is not based on reality: the Chinese authorities have never promised Washington anything

like that. Moreover, since Deng Xiaoping, they have always said quite explicitly that reforms are needed to strengthen China, and the power of the Communist Party is among the “Four Cardinal Principles” that are not negotiable (Deng, 1979). But the belief in China’s evolution in the right direction was based on Washington’s broader ideological understanding of the historical process, according to which all societies must sooner or later adopt the Western political and socioeconomic model as the highest form of social development.

After Xi Jinping’s rise to power in 2012, China’s domestic and foreign policy underwent significant adjustments, partly due to changes in the national development strategy. China departed from many political rules and traditions laid down by the architect of Chinese reforms, Deng Xiaoping, in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. Economic growth as an absolute priority was replaced by other goals. The idea of prioritizing accelerated economic growth has two reasons: a Marxist one (since the ideal society—communism—should emerge on the basis of highly developed productive forces, which will make overabundance possible) and a nationalist one, that is, realizing the “Chinese dream”—the common goal of Chinese revolutionaries to overcome the lagging behind caused by the “century of humiliation” at the hands of imperialists, and restoring China’s leading position in the world. To achieve this goal, former Chinese leaders were willing to turn a blind eye to many things, including the growth of “capitalist” relations, the strengthening of private monopolies and privileges for foreign investors, and a slack anti-corruption policy. The structure of power was significantly decentralized, and the regions received substantial financial and other rights. In foreign policy, Deng proclaimed the principle of modesty, formulated as “hide your strength, bide your time.”

The new leadership decided that a further retreat from the principles of socialism would lead to the degeneration of society. There was a danger that soon it would be no different from the one that existed under the Kuomintang, against which the Communists had actually fought (People’s Daily Department of Commentary, 2020). To combat this trend, power was vigorously centralized and concentrated in the hands of the leader personally. The authorities started a resolute

fight against corruption, the influence of oligarchs and all sorts of non-state “influencers” on social networks, as well as “those who doubt” allegiance to the party both inside and outside its ranks.

The new leader expressed the feelings of the part of the elite and population that believed that China had already become strong enough to gradually abandon Deng Xiaoping’s policy of compromise with the bourgeois world in order to obtain investment and advanced technologies, and start pursuing a more confident policy. Ambitious programs like “One Belt, One Road,” “Made in China 2025,” and others were announced to secure China’s technological independence and leading place in the global economy and politics (Lukin, 2016). These programs were based on the country’s real economic needs, including the need to find investment opportunities, sources of raw materials and new markets abroad, and use excessive labor and production capacities there in the interests of the sprawling Chinese industry. In principle, the foreign economic policy recorded in these programs had been carried out before as well, but its declaration in comprehensive programs pompously announced to the world clearly indicated the rejection of Deng Xiaoping’s postulates.

The adoption of economic programs was accompanied by changes in foreign policy and strategic behavior. Chinese pundits wrote that it was time to step up foreign policy activity, and, following the example of the United States and its allies, build military bases abroad, actively defend China’s core interests outside the country, including by military means, and impose sanctions against countries that dare pursue an unfriendly policy towards China. Experts had voiced such ideas before as well, but it was under Xi Jinping that they were gradually converted into official documents. At the strategic level, the concept of ‘core interests’ was expanded significantly. In Chinese political discourse, this means readiness to protect them by all, including military, means. Now they include not only sovereignty over Taiwan, but also the fight against separatism in Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang, all territorial disputes with neighboring countries, and even not quite clearly defined “basic guarantees of the stability of the state-political system and sustainable socioeconomic development” (SCIO, 2011).

All this somewhat confused the Western world, evoked its strong reaction, and accelerated the policy of containing China. U.S. President Donald Trump, who took office in 2017, sharply changed the approach towards China, initially intended to engage it in international systems in exchange for the “softening” of its policy, and started a trade war with Beijing. Such a dramatic turn in the American policy came as a surprise to Beijing. It believed that the Chinese economy was so deeply incorporated into the world economy, so intertwined and interdependent with the American one that Washington would not dare take radical measures to isolate Beijing for fear of damage to its own country. However, the United States decided otherwise: it thought that the political consequences of China’s rise as a world economic leader were more dangerous than the damage to the U.S.’s own economy from anti-Chinese measures. In addition, the Trump administration was convinced that China would not have the courage to start a total economic war, and that Washington’s protectionist measures would only benefit the United States.

CHINESE STRATEGY AND DOCUMENTS OF THE 20TH CPC NATIONAL CONGRESS

Washington’s decisive steps caused confusion in Beijing, provoking debates on the correctness of the Chinese leadership’s policy, which was criticized euphemistically but sometimes quite openly (for a review of this discussion, see: Lukin, 2019). However, the consolidation of power by Xi Jinping, who insisted on the correctness of his course, ensured the triumph of his policy of intensification and determination, although China softened its rhetoric somewhat.

This can clearly be seen from the documents of the 20th CPC National Congress, particularly the Central Committee’s report delivered by Xi Jinping. As before, this extremely general political document did not include an analysis of regional conflicts or China’s relations with certain countries. This would have necessitated problems to be described and accusations made against other countries, which would certainly have evoked their reaction. Nevertheless, the report contains several blocks that

are obviously intended to strengthen China's positions in the confrontation with the U.S.

The first such block is the development and maintenance of a new integrated national security system. National security has been declared the "backbone of the nation's rebirth." It includes a variety of aspects such as people's security ("ultimate goal"), political security ("fundamental task"), military, technological, cultural, and social security ("important pillars"), international security ("a support"), and safeguards for ensuring economic, major infrastructure, financial, cyber, data, biological, resource, nuclear, space, and maritime security. The report sets the task of enhancing China's capacity for disaster prevention, mitigation, and relief, and for responding to and providing support during major public emergencies. It also calls for coordinated steps to ensure external and internal security, homeland and public security, traditional and non-traditional security, China's own security and common security (State Council, 2022). To this end, according to some reports, a single system of national security bodies, from the center to the provinces, is being created under the auspices of the CPC Central State Security Committee, established back in 2013 and headed by Xi Jinping himself (in addition to the systems of the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of State Security, and apparently standing above them) (Yun, 2013).

The second block clearly states China's position on the sovereignty of Hong Kong, Macao and, most importantly, Taiwan. Although no specific countries opposing Beijing's policy in these areas are named, the report clearly emphasizes that "we will crack down hard on anti-China elements who attempt to create chaos in Hong Kong and Macao. We will take resolute action to prevent and stop interference in the affairs of Hong Kong and Macao by external forces" (State Council, 2022). Given Beijing's rhetoric accusing the U.S. and its allies of inciting unrest in Hong Kong, it is clear to whom these messages are addressed.

As for Taiwan, the report says nothing particularly new, and even proclaims that "the best way to realize reunification across the Taiwan Strait" is "peaceful reunification," and declares this task "a historic mission" and "an unshakable commitment." At the same time, Beijing

in no way promises to renounce the use of force, but says that “we reserve the option of taking all measures necessary.” The report strongly denounces external intervention, although the United States, to which these words are clearly addressed, and whose policy of building up official ties with Taiwan is regarded by China as provocative, is not mentioned in the document (State Council, 2022).

Finally, the third, and perhaps most important, block is the common goal of ensuring economic development with the help of modern technologies, original and pioneering scientific and technological research to achieve breakthroughs in core technologies in key fields while concentrating on “China’s strategic needs.” As a result, by the middle of this century, the country should become “a great modern socialist country that leads the world in terms of composite national strength and international influence” (State Council, 2022).

The success of this policy can make China a world leader not only in terms of GDP, but also in cutting-edge technologies, both civilian and military. Coupled with the commitment to create an even better army that should always be ready for war, this cannot but raise real concern in the United States for fear of losing its place as a global leader in technological innovation and the world hegemon.

So the language of the report indicates that Xi Jinping’s leadership is trying to continue the previous policy in substantive terms, while somewhat moderating anti-American and anti-Western rhetoric, without mentioning specific competing countries and opponents, so as not to annoy them too much and to maintain constructive relations with them. After the Congress, the Chinese leader followed up on his rhetoric by sending greetings to the participants in a gala dinner of the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations—a non-profit educational organization dedicated to promoting mutual understanding between the two countries—assuring them that “China stands ready to work with the United States to find the right way to get along with each other in the new era on the basis of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation, which will benefit not only the two countries but also the whole world” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022b).

AMERICAN STRATEGY: IDEOLOGY AND REALITY

American ideologues are unlikely to be brought to reason. In the United States, both personnel and strategic decisions adopted by the Chinese Congress were taken with hostility. None of the hopes for change, ranging from the appointment to top positions of the supporters of a more “liberal” economic course to the removal of Xi Jinping from power by his opponents, came true. Instead, the new Chinese leadership is likely to pursue a more authoritarian policy at home and show greater self-confidence in relations with the outside world.

The Washington elite are debating what to do about it. President Biden and his advisers insist on following their course, which the president himself has described as “walk and chew gum at the same time,” that is, put pressure and criticize, but at the same time discuss issues that are beneficial to the United States, persuading the opponent to make agreements and concessions. At a meeting with the DoD top brass on October 26, 2022, Biden emphasized that intense competition with China should be conducted responsibly, that “we have to maintain our military advantage by making clear that—that we do not seek conflict.” While acknowledging that the U.S. was ready for, and even seeking, fierce competition, he argued that conflict was not inevitable, and that he had repeatedly said so to the Chinese leader (The White House, 2022b).

In the abovementioned National Security Strategy, China is named as the only competitor with “both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to advance that objective” (National Security Strategy, 2022, p. 8). At the same time, it says that “the PRC is also central to the global economy and has a significant impact on shared challenges, particularly climate change and global public health” (National Security Strategy, 2022, p. 24).

It further concludes that it is possible for “the United States and the PRC to coexist peacefully, and share in and contribute to human progress together,” and that the United States, while not “walking away from our principles” will “engage constructively with the PRC wherever

we can,” particularly in such areas as climate, pandemic threats, nonproliferation, countering illicit and illegal narcotics, the global food crisis, and macroeconomic issues (National Security Strategy, 2022, p. 25).

At the same time, stronger sentiments are growing among Democrats, especially after the 20th CPC Congress. A *Washington Post* editorial with the telling headline “Xi’s Coronation Portends a Hard Era for China and the World” (the newspaper has lately been expressing the views of the radical imperialist wing of the Democratic Party) criticizes Biden’s policy of constructive engagement with China in areas beneficial to the United States while continuing to compete with it generally. The authors argue: “Half a century after President Richard M. Nixon’s opening to China, two decades after President Bill Clinton pushed Chinese most-favored-nation trading status through Congress,² with bipartisan support, it is evident that the United States cannot guide China’s rise compatibly with U.S. strategic interests, much less in harmony with the rules-based international order, as many architects of past Western engagement efforts—governmental, corporate, scientific and intellectual—had hoped.” While welcoming the tough part of Biden’s China policy, in particular, his statements about supporting Taiwan, strengthening cooperation with Australia, Japan, South Korea, and India to deter Beijing, and the restrictions, imposed during the CCP Congress, on the export of semiconductors and chip-making equipment to Chinese companies, the authors explicitly criticize the soft part of his strategy. Quoting the document’s commitment to “work together, for the good of our people and for the good of the world” on such issues as climate and pandemic threats, they say: “We hope that’s true, but fear it’s not.” The authors propose a policy of unlimited pressure on China, based on the fact that the measures announced by Xi at the Congress are likely to lead to a recession in the Chinese economy and social problems in the country, and a tough U.S. policy will intensify this crisis and thus force China to change its course (The Washington Post, 2022).

² In fact, Clinton only extended the validity of the most-favored-nation status which was granted to China back in 1979 (US General Accounting Office, 1998).

The Republicans' position on China is also inconsistent. The most influential of them, Donald Trump, acting pretty much the way he did during his presidency, simultaneously criticizes the Biden administration for being too soft and says that he could easily "get along" with Xi Jinping, whom he respects for effectively defending Chinese interests (Trump, 2022). But essentially, this approach is not very much different from Biden's, except for the latter's intention to be more sensitive to the interests of allies.

ASIA AS THE MAIN ARENA OF CONFRONTATION

The current state of U.S.-China relations leads to serious confrontation in many regions, primarily Asia, since Beijing is trying to position itself as the leader of the Global South, which encompasses Asian countries, and to create a certain security belt around China, while the U.S. views this as an encroachment on its global interests and seeks to create as narrow a ring of deterrence around China as possible. This provokes particularly fierce competition for influence in the immediate periphery of China, for countries and territories bordering or in close proximity to it.

This struggle intensified during Donald Trump's presidency. It was already back then that Washington began to note that Chinese actions in Asia posed a serious challenge to the U.S. The Missile Defense Review, published in 2019 by the Office of the U.S. Secretary of Defense, explicitly states that the main source of threat to American security in the region comes from China, which "is also developing missile capabilities intended to deny the United States the capability and freedom of action to protect U.S. allies and partners in Asia. A key component of China's military modernization is its conventional ballistic missile arsenal designed to prevent U.S. military access to support regional allies and partners. China is improving its ability to strike regional targets, such as U.S. bases and naval assets, at greater ranges with the addition of the growing number of medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles. This includes sophisticated anti-ship ballistic missiles that pose a direct threat to U.S. aircraft carriers" (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2019, p.vi).

It was during Trump's presidency that American experts began to voice concern about China focusing its main efforts on the development of the Air Force and the Navy. Over the past few decades, the Chinese People's Liberation Army has stopped being a predominantly ground force and has now the world's largest fleet in terms of the number of warships and is the second largest in the world in terms of the number of large warships of the main classes (destroyers, frigates, aircraft carriers) (Kashin and Lukin, 2021, p.22). According to American estimates, this can significantly strengthen Beijing's strategic position and allow it to control transport arteries that are vital for the United States (Torkunov, 2019). First of all, this creates tensions in the South China Sea, where the United States strongly rejects Beijing's claims to most of the water area (approximately 80 percent) and where China has begun building military facilities on the islands and reefs under its control (Pompeo, 2020b).

In addition, U.S. apprehensions are caused by the economic activities of Chinese companies in the Asia-Pacific countries as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, which, in Washington's opinion, will make them economically dependent on China. Now and then these activities provoke discontent among local residents, the press, and the opposition in some countries, where Chinese companies are accused of what Westerners used to be blamed for before: ignoring environmental and labor laws, corrupting local authorities, using exclusively Chinese labor and technology, credit bondage, etc. At some point, such accusations played a significant political role in Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Fiji, Vietnam, and a number of other countries, where the United States actively used them to increase its own influence.

The Biden administration has publicly stated Asia's role in the confrontation with China. The U.S. believes that although competition with China is becoming more and more global, it is most pronounced in the Indo-Pacific, which should be free and open (this slogan alone exposes U.S. opposition to China's claims to the South China Sea). The National Security Strategy explicitly states the U.S. administration's policy of opposing Chinese influence on its neighbors in Asia: "Many of our allies and partners, especially in the Indo-Pacific, stand on the

frontlines of the PRC's coercion and are rightly determined to seek to ensure their own autonomy, security, and prosperity. We will support their ability to make sovereign decisions in line with their interests and values, free from external pressure, and work to provide high-standard and scaled investment, development assistance, and markets" (National Security Strategy, 2022, p. 24). If this is translated from ideological language into plain one, it urges those under Chinese influence to break free of it and join the United States, for which they will be well rewarded.

This is not to say that this tactic does not bring results. Its success is not due to the American political ingenuity, but because China's strengthening evokes ambivalent feelings among many of its neighbors. On the one hand, there is a great desire to use its economic and financial potential for their own needs. On the other hand, they fear to fall into economic and political dependence. Moreover, China's policy, sometimes involving rather inflexible methods to increase its influence, in particular, by using the Chinese community and local agents of influence, causes legitimate discontent. This is particularly true of countries with a significant number of ethnic Chinese such as Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Fiji, etc. For example, the Chinese question became one of the main issues during the 2018 elections in Malaysia, where the opposition, which came to power for the first time in sixty years, actively used anti-Chinese slogans. Loan debts to China played a significant role in political destabilization in Sri Lanka in 2022. The struggle for influence between China and U.S. allies in the Pacific island states, in particular Fiji and the Solomon Islands, is intensifying. The territorial dispute with China periodically sparks anti-Chinese unrest in Vietnam, and its leadership shows more and more interest in cooperating with its former enemy, the United States. The question of Chinese influence is acute in Singapore, where about 70 percent of the population are ethnic Chinese. Singapore authorities routinely accuse China of trying to use ethnic Chinese as agents of influence. In 2017, after Huang Jing, an American professor of Chinese descent, was accused of acting as Beijing's agent of influence and expelled from the country, a nationwide discussion began on how to fight China's

attempts to use ethnic Chinese for its own political purposes. The U.S. is viewed as a natural ally in this fight (The Straits Times, 2017; Wong, 2020).

As for China itself, within the framework of the Biden concept, on the one hand, the United States accuses it of all mortal sins and promises to hold it accountable for “genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang, human rights violations in Tibet, and the dismantling of Hong Kong’s autonomy and freedoms,” pledges to assist neighboring states in developing their armies to defend themselves against China, and surround China with a network of new and old alliances such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Australia, India, Japan, U.S.), AUKUS (Australia, UK, U.S.), and I2U2 Group (India, Israel, OAU, U.S.), while on the other hand, Washington is going to engage in cooperation with any country, including geopolitical rivals (like, obviously, China), which wishes to work constructively (National Security Strategy, 2022, p. 27).

As for individual countries in the region, the U.S. plans to use a selective approach to various groups. Washington has reiterated its “iron-clad” commitments to its allies—Australia, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand—and promised modernization of alliances. With regard to Japan, the U.S. has said that its security guarantees also apply to the Senkaku Islands (called Diaoyu in Chinese) disputed by China. India has been declared the largest partner in the field of defense, and Washington intends to work with it to develop a joint vision for the Indo-Pacific. As for China’s only ally, the DPRK, the U.S. has reaffirmed its policy of negotiations for its complete denuclearization. As far as China’s neighbor, Myanmar (referred to as Burma in the document), the Strategy just mentions the commitment to restore “democracy” there (National Security Strategy, 2022, p. 38).

The Strategy also mentions Central Asian states with which the U.S. plans to develop cooperation within the framework of the C5+1 diplomatic platform (five Central Asian states plus the United States) in a number of areas such as climate adaptation, regional energy and food security, access to global markets, and even regional integration (National Security Strategy, 2022, p. 39). Apparently, the U.S. is seeking

to counteract Russia's influence in the region. However, given the growing role of Beijing in the region and the coordinated Russian-Chinese influence as part of the efforts to pair the Eurasian Economic Union and the One Belt One Road Initiative and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, this may be applied to China as well.

On the Taiwan issue, the Strategy contains assurances of the U.S. adherence to the three communiqués and other documents previously signed with China, and condemns attempts by any party to undermine the status quo. It also says that the United States does not support the idea of Taiwan's independence, but at the same time it reiterates its obligation to support Taiwan's self-defense and its ability to resist any forceful or coercive actions (National Security Strategy, 2022, p. 24).

However, the practice of Biden's leadership shows that the latter obligation in his interpretation is completely at odds with the former. The documents signed with China clearly state that U.S. arms supplies to Taiwan should be reduced, and contacts with its authorities should be unofficial. Meanwhile, the United States, under both Trump and Biden, has been constantly increasing military supplies to the island and raising the level of official contacts with it as evidenced by the latest visit to Taiwan by the third person in the U.S. leadership, Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi in August 2022, which can hardly be classified as unofficial contacts.

Moreover, it is Biden who has actually changed the traditional American policy of "strategic ambiguity" with regard to Taiwan, which did not explicitly say whether the United States would defend Taiwan by military means if Beijing used military force. Biden is the first American president since Nixon to have answered this question quite confidently several times in the affirmative (Wang, 2022). Apparently, the Biden administration believes that by so doing it is deterring Beijing from using military force to reunite with Taiwan. However, there is a possibility that such rhetoric will play a provocative role, since China may decide that things are moving towards the declaration of Taiwan's formal independence, which no Chinese leader can allow. In any case, the struggle between the United States and China for Taiwan will escalate in the years to come.

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The confrontation between China and the United States in the Asia-Pacific, primarily in countries neighboring China, will intensify in the coming years. On the U.S. side, this is determined by its general ideological approach to global development, according to which the very existence of large and growing states pursuing an independent foreign policy is a threat to American security, since it undermines U.S. “leadership” that ensures normal and progressive development of the world. China’s strategy is to strengthen its international status and regain its legitimate leading position, which it lost as a result of the “century of humiliation” in the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. This strategy is not aimed directly at combating the United States, but assumes an anti-American character all the same because its implementation requires Beijing to counter the U.S. policy of containing China.

To achieve its goals, the United States exploits the fears of China’s numerous neighbors about the growth of Chinese power, which, from the U.S.’s point of view, could in the new conditions lead China to try to restore its traditional medieval system of dominance over neighbors. Such fears are particularly widespread in countries with large Chinese communities, which Beijing uses to increase its influence: Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, etc. As a result, these and other neighboring states often view the strengthening of strategic cooperation with the United States as a real counterweight to the Chinese challenge, even despite numerous disagreements with Washington.

In the current situation, China is the most important and reliable strategic partner of Russia, but the development of relations with other Asian states, including those that fear the growth of Chinese influence, is also important. Therefore it would be prudent for Russia to apply a differentiated approach.

All other things being equal, it would be wise for Russia to support China’s policy, but not unconditionally. Russia should seek mutuality, offering support for certain Chinese positions in Asia on a reciprocal basis. At the same time, Moscow could use a variable approach to countries that hold different views in relation to Russia.

With regard to the states closest to Russia, such as the DPRK or Myanmar, Russia's approach could be completely consonant with that of China, as borne out by their joint position on the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue. A more flexible approach is needed towards countries that are developing relations with the United States to counterbalance Chinese influence (Vietnam, Mongolia, the Philippines, Indonesia, to some extent Singapore and South Korea). Usually, these countries' interest towards the United States boils down mainly to certain security guarantees and an additional source of investment as an alternative to China. To some extent, Russia could offer its own assistance in solving these problems to balance the influence of both China and the United States, although, of course, its resources are quite limited.

A special approach is needed towards India, which is turning into Russia's most important partner in the context of anti-Russian sanctions. India, for its own reasons, is extremely annoyed by the attempts of the United States and its allies to achieve global hegemony, it is traditionally friendly towards Russia, but at the same time it has strained relations with China. India is also strengthening its influence in the world, and the Indo-Pacific concept is an important element of this process. At the same time, India interprets this concept differently from the United States and its allies, and officially rejects its anti-Chinese, let alone anti-Russian orientation. Given this, India is confused by Russia's total rejection of this concept. Therefore it would be more productive not to fight the concept, which has already become part of the international discourse and has been accepted not only in India, but also in the Southeast Asian states, but to try to fill it with content that would be beneficial for Russia by removing anti-Chinese rhetoric and emphasizing the role of India, China, and Russia's other partners in the region. Such an approach would meet more understanding in New Delhi.

In Central Asia, Russia needs to coordinate its policy with China to stem the growing influence of the United States and its allies in the region. China's economic power is destined to grow there and it would be pointless to try to counteract it. Besides, it would be more acceptable to Russia than the influence of the United States or the

EU, all the more so since China is willing to respect the interests of Russia in the region. As part of common coordination, Russia could focus on ensuring security, an area where it has more possibilities (as borne out by the events in Kazakhstan in January 2022), without neglecting, of course, the development of trade, economic, and investment cooperation with the Central Asian states. Finally, with regard to U.S. allies that fully share the hostile anti-Russian policy (for example, Japan), Russia could act tougher and support all of China's claims against them.

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