

# "Pivot to Asia": the prospects for the Asian NATO's formation

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**Keywords:** "Pivot to Asia" policy, the Pacific Rim, the United States, China, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the "Asian NATO".

## «Շրջադարձ դեպի Ասիա» ԱՄՆ-ի քաղաքականությունը. «Ասիական ՆԱՏՕ»-ի ձևավորման հեռանկարները

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**Ամփոփում՝** Ասիա-Խաղաղովկիանոսյան տարածաշրջանն (ԱԽՏ) ունի ռազմավարական շատ կարևոր դիրք ողջ աշխարհի համար: Առաջիկա տասնամյակների ընթացքում այս տարածաշրջանում կակտիվանա աշխարհի գործադիր դերակատարների /այդ թվում՝ ոչ միայն պետությունների, այլև խոշոր անդրազգային կորպորացիաների/ հիմնական մրցակցային պայքարը: Այս համատեքստում չի բացառվում նաև «Ասիական ՆԱՏՕ-ի» ձևավորվումը, որը կդառնա ԱՄՆ-ի քաղաքականության կարևոր մի գործիք, և անշուշտ կօգտագործվի ընդդեմ Չինաստանի:

**Վճռորոշ բառեր՝** «Շրջադարձ դեպի Ասիա» քաղաքականությունը, Ասիա-խաղաղովկիանոսյան տարածաշրջան, Միացյալ Նահանգներ, Չինաստան, Տրանս-խաղաղովկիանոսյան գործընկերություն (TPP), «Ասիական ՆԱՏՕ»:

## «Поворот к Азии»: перспективы формирования «Азиатского НАТО»

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**Резюме:** Азиатско-тихоокеанский регион (АТР) имеет весьма важное стратегическое расположение и, соответственно, значение для всего мира. В ближайшие десятилетия именно в данном регионе будет разворачиваться основная конкурентная борьба глобальных мировых акторов, к числу которых относятся не только государства, но и крупнейшие ТНК. В этом контексте, не исключено возможное формирование «Азиатского НАТО», которое станет важным инструментом в американской политике по «сдерживанию» Китая.

**Ключевые слова:** политика «Поворот к Азии», «Тихоокеанский регион», Соединенные Штаты, Китай, Транстихоокеанское партнерство (TPP), «Азиатское НАТО».

The new time is a very special period of the World History. In the previous centuries, the situation was absolutely different. The primitive tribes have been scattered over the surface of the planet, and then the powerful states in the admirable civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Armenia, Persia, India and China, and even the great ancient Hellas and Rome could not give contemporaries an idea of the worldwide nature of development. The human's view of world space was limited to neighboring countries and semi-fantastic stories of "experienced people" about distant lands. Understanding of historical time usually covered the life of only a few generations, and during this period it was impossible to catch the changes in the traditional way of life.

What was inherent in the past? One state conquered or destroyed another, demonstrating to the whole world its military-political, economic and cultural superiority. Of course, philosophers and scholars have been thinking about the unity of the world, and these reflections have not been speculative. They have been tested in the practice of civilization, trying to unite the whole world by hegemony. Humanity may be aware, but we see, that even at the moment it cannot accept the fact that it is doomed to live many power centers in the same historical space, within the same historical time. However, as before, we are trying to capture each other's states or resources, using more often the hybrid wars and satellites than the method of direct confrontation.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, many Western neo-conservative politicians began to believe that "the history chose the United States to become the Earth's hegemony"<sup>1</sup>. The events taking place in the last decades clearly demonstrate that neo-conservatism is the only ideology of the USA that is in effect at the present time. Probably, with the ebb of the change in the slogan: "America is above all" has been smoothly transformed into the US President Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again".

### **The "Arab NATO" Project**

The Trump's administration is quietly pushing ahead with a bid to create a new security and political alliance with six Gulf Arab states, Egypt and Jordan, in part to counter Iran's expansion in the region, according to U.S. and Arab officials. After a visit to Riyadh, the US President D. Trump is planning to create The Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA) to keep a tab on Iran<sup>2</sup>. MESA should include the Sunni partner countries of the United States, which will develop joint mechanisms for responding to external aggression, and create a unified air defense system. In addition to military objectives, the pact will have to strengthen economic and diplomatic ties. For the first time, the creation of this kind of coalition started talking last year in Saudi Arabia during Trump's stay - they say, it would be nice to conclude such a "security pact". The main lobbyists of the project in the Middle East are Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, unable to cope with Iranian expansion on their own. Previously, the "Arab NATO" will include: Jordan, Egypt and 6 "Gulf"-States (Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE, Oman and Saudi Arabia)<sup>3</sup>. It should be noted that only the list looks very optimistic. There are many hindrances to "Arab NATO" Project:

- *Qatar is listed in outcasts and for a year of isolation significantly improved relations with Iran;*
- *Oman has traditionally adheres to neutrality;*
- *The armed forces of Kuwait together with Bahrain can hardly be able to allocate more than one or two hundred people;*
- *Egypt has already refused the quartering of troops in Syria.*

The fate of MESA will be discussed in Washington in mid-October 2018. But it is rightly noted in Iran that "the establishment of such an

alliance will not solve the crisis of relations exactly, on the contrary, it is a step towards an even greater escalation and deepening the gap between Iran, its regional allies and Arab countries supported by the United States"<sup>4</sup>.

### **The US foreign policy toward the APR**

Presently, the Asia-Pacific region (APR) includes up to 40% of world GDP and about 60% of world trade turnover. According to leading analysts in the field of economy, GDP growth in the Asia-Pacific region is expected to reach 70% in 2030<sup>5</sup>. The growth rates of economic indicators of this most dynamically developing region are estimated at more than 5% annually<sup>6</sup>. In addition, developing and developed APR states are the largest exporters and importers of high technologies. In this region, large projects have been implemented and planned for implementation in such sectors as heavy industry, metallurgy, bioengineering, transport, electronics, energy and mechanical engineering. The volume of industrial products produced in the region, including aerospace applications, is also constantly increasing. Many of the largest foreign corporations are actively continuing to open offices and deploy capacities in the APR states, which are considered low-cost (Low Cost Country). Given that the old industrial centers in Europe and the northeast of the United States are gradually dying out, a number of economists suggest that the center of world economic activity may in the near future move to the Asia-Pacific region.

According to some American analysts, the main strategic rival for dominance in the Asia-Pacific region (APR), is China. We assume that the first ideas of the "Asian NATO" began in the middle of the zero, when the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement (TPSEP or P4) was signed by Brunei, Chile, New Zealand and Singapore in 2005. Beginning in 2008, additional countries joined the discussion for a broader agreement: Australia, Canada, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, the United States, and Vietnam, bringing the negotiating countries to twelve. Many observers have argued the trade deal would have served a geopolitical purpose, namely to reduce the signatories' dependence on Chinese trade and bring the signatories closer to the United States. But, In January 2017, the United States withdrew from the agreement<sup>7</sup>. The other 11

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Craig Roberts,

<https://aftershock.news/?q=node/275415&full>, 17.08.2018

<sup>2</sup> Bandow D.,

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/dougbandow/2017/05/20/donald-trump-visits-riyadh-putting-saudi-royals-before-american-people/#2cd67b7e1cda>, 19.08.2018

<sup>3</sup> Bayoumy Y., Landay J., Strobel W.,

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-gulf-alliance/trump-seeks-to-revive-arab-nato-to-confront-iran-idUSKBN1KH2IK>, 22.08.2018

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<sup>4</sup> Kabalan M.,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/trump-arab-nato-plan-counter-iran-doomed-fail-180810090115814.html>, 20.08.2018

<sup>5</sup> Fensom A., <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/asia-to-stay-worlds-fastest-growing-region-through-2030/>, 20.08.2018

<sup>6</sup> Rosenberg M., <https://www.thoughtco.com/pacific-rim-and-economic-tigers-1435777>, 22.08.2018

<sup>7</sup> The white house official website,

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential->

TPP countries agreed in May 2017 to revive it and reached agreement in January 2018. In March 2018, the 11 countries signed the revised version of the agreement, called Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPATPP).

Despite the United States refusal to participate in the TPP in 2017, in our opinion, the new US administration will continue the military-political and economic process of "reversal" towards the Asia-Pacific region (APR), announced in 2011 by the previous US administration in the framework of the "National Security Strategy". In this region are the key foreign policy interests of the United States. So what challenges are on the agenda for US foreign policy in the Pacific region?

- *Regional security and stability;*
- *Strengthening the military-political and economic ties with allies and possible new US partners in the region;*
- *The DPRK's refusal from the "nuclear program";*
- **Containment of the PRC strengthening;**

The United States is certainly interested in the security of its country, as well as in the domination of the region. This is confirmed by the fact that at the height of the crises in eastern Ukraine (Donbass) and the Middle East (Syria and Iraq), at the end of July 2014, the head of the USPACOM Samuel Loklir stated "about the invariability of the earlier plans to concentrate up to 60% of American warships and airplanes by the year 2020 in the Pacific Ocean". Later, this has been also stated by the Defence Secretary Leon Panetta: "The US is planning to move the majority of its warships to the Asia-Pacific region by 2020"<sup>8</sup>. This figure to date is slightly more than 52% [6, p. 54]. All these changes and redeployments of the military equipment of the United States undoubtedly point out the importance of the Pacific region in the US strategy and the US's desire to play a leading role in maintaining the security and stability of the APR. Talking about "security and stability" in the region, it is necessary to emphasize that Washington sees the main "threat" in Beijing. One of the most important issues on the agenda of US foreign policy is **"containment" of China's strengthening**, which as a result of intensive economic growth since the late 1980s has become one of the most important actors not only in the Pacific region (APR), but throughout the world.

The Obama administration at the first stage of its activity gave priority to diplomatic attempts to persuade official Beijing that the latter should correct the economic and political course of the

country's development in favor of Washington. In return, Washington promised to establish "special relations with Beijing", however, without hiding the intention of "containment" the latter. By "special relations" we understand a kind of big project - **"bipolarity"**, of course, on American terms. Within the framework of this project, the United States and the PRC would have reached an agreement on the joint construction and management of the new world order, of course, while maintaining the leading role of the United States. Being in Beijing in November 2014, the President of the United States, Barack Obama, urged China "to participate in the establishment of the world order, and not undermine it"<sup>9</sup>. The well-known American political scientist and strategist of Polish origin, Zbigniew Brzezinski, suggested in one of his works to go even further - to consolidate friendly bilateral relations between the US and China in the "Pacific Act" [3, p. 82]. Z. Brzezinski was convinced that "only these two largest and influential powers will be able to establish a new world order" [3, p. 146-148]. However, the Americans came across the intractability of Beijing in the formation of a new world order under the protectorate of the American-Chinese duumvirate. For this reason, Washington will continue its policy of strengthening the indirect military-political as well as direct economic pressure on Beijing. In particular, the confirmation of the latter is the US-China trade war.

#### **What's at stake in US-China trade war**

Washington avoids direct confrontation with Beijing in every way. The United States goods and services trade with China totaled an estimated \$710.4 billion in 2017<sup>10</sup>. Exports were \$187.5 billion; imports were \$522.9 billion. The U.S. goods and services trade deficit with China was \$335.4 billion in 2017<sup>11</sup>. And the US is the largest importer of Chinese goods (21.5%), therefore, it is not profitable for the United States to sever such ties. However, it does not prevent the start of a trade war in order to reduce the trade deficit between the two leading economies of the world.

China and the United States are locked in an ongoing trade war as each country has introduced tariffs on goods traded with the other. US President Donald Trump had promised in his campaign to fix China's "longtime abuse of the broken international

memorandum-regarding-withdrawal-united-states-trans-pacific-partnership-negotiations-agreement/, 22.08.2018

<sup>8</sup> *BBC News Agency*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-18305750>, 24.08.2018

<sup>9</sup> *Spetalnick M., Martina M.*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-usa/obama-urges-china-to-be-partner-in-ensuring-world-order-idUSKCN0IU16C20141110>, 25.08.2018

<sup>10</sup> *Office of the US Trade Representatives*, <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/china-mongolia-taiwan/peoples-republic-china>, 10.09.2018

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

system and unfair practices"<sup>12</sup>. Starting in January 2018 the U.S imposed a tariff on solar panel imports, most of which are manufactured in China. On July 6, the U.S. specifically targeted China by imposed 25% tariffs on \$34 billion of imported Chinese goods as part of Trump's tariffs policy, which then led China to respond with similarly sized tariffs on U.S. products. A tariff on an additional \$16 billion of Chinese imports was added in mid-August, with China responding proportionately. A further tariff on \$200 billion of Chinese goods is to go into effect on September 24, to which China plans to respond to with tariffs on \$60 billion of US goods. The Trump administration said the tariffs were necessary to protect intellectual property of U.S. businesses, and to help reduce the U.S. trade deficit with China.

### **The "Asian NATO" Project**

Despite the fact that the new US administration, led by Donald Trump, has refused to participate in the United States in the TPP trade agreement, Washington will continue its policy of "containing" China. Based on this policy, an analogy to the "Arab NATO" under the US protectorate, which in the Middle East is aimed at deterring Iran, can be created in the APR region. "The Modi government could shape the Trump administration's Indo-Pacific strategy and possibly contribute to the idea of an Asian NATO to counter China's assertiveness in the region", -said the Indian military expert Palki Sharma<sup>13</sup>. Undoubtedly, India's role in this project is very high. This state, along with Australia, Japan and South Korea should be the foundation of Asian NATO. In the future, for security reasons, some countries of South-East Asia region will join the Asian NATO. Then Washington with the help of small countries in South-East Asia will provoke Beijing. They will push China to a conflict in the South China Sea because of the disputed islands (Spratly, Senkaku/Diaoyu and Taiwan). Undoubtedly, based on mutual security commitments (probably Asian NATO), larger countries (India, Japan and Australia) will come to help small countries. And, of course, Washington will give assurances to the countries of the Asian NATO about the readiness of the United States to give them all possible support in case of aggravation of confrontation with the PRC.

It is also important to note that all states that currently have territorial disputes with Beijing are de jure or de facto allies of Washington. Considering that China is the key trade and

economic partner of the United States, Washington cannot resort to direct confrontation with Beijing, which will lead to serious problems for the Americans themselves. In this regard, the most pragmatic solution to the issue of "containing" China is to drag the latter into a regional conflict over disputed islands. It also increases the likelihood of the formation of the Asian NATO.

### **Conclusion**

We will try to label the biggest obstacle to a collective security agreement in Asia:

- *First, one of the main reasons many argue that a NATO-like organization could never work in Asia is because "the countries of the region retain diverse interests and regional priorities and insufficient levels of trust to band together";*
- *Second, there is a huge gap of countries with disparate interests and increasing closeness with Beijing spanning the region. Take for example the Philippines. Once considered a possible linchpin of such a "China Containment Coalition," the country has for the time being pivoted into the warm embrace of Beijing. Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, just to name a few, are all moving closer to China, not closer to the United States;*
- *Third, the perceived advantages of bilateral and ad-hoc security arrangements;*
- *Another supposed obstacle to a NATO-like organization in Asia is America and regional states' fears of alienating China.*

China is not currently as menacing as the Soviet Union was to Europe in the late 1940s. Furthermore, it took a number of strong catalysts from the Soviet Union and its allies (Berlin, nuclear weapon testing, Communists winning in China and the Korean War)<sup>14</sup> to compel the U.S. and its Atlantic allies to form a collective security arrangement. The same is likely to prove true in Asia. While no immediate Asian NATO is likely to be forthcoming, this could change very quickly if China takes a brazen action such as invading Taiwan or the Diaoyu Islands (Senkaku Islands). The United States will continue to put pressure on China with the trade war policy, sanctions, and the ideas of creating "Asian NATO". However, given the pragmatic nature of the Chinese nation, whose government, up to the present, follows the precepts of Confucius, it will be extremely difficult to break this nation.

<sup>12</sup> *Wiledson K.*, <https://punchng.com/us-sanctions-russia-china-look-for-common-solutions/>, 10.09.2018

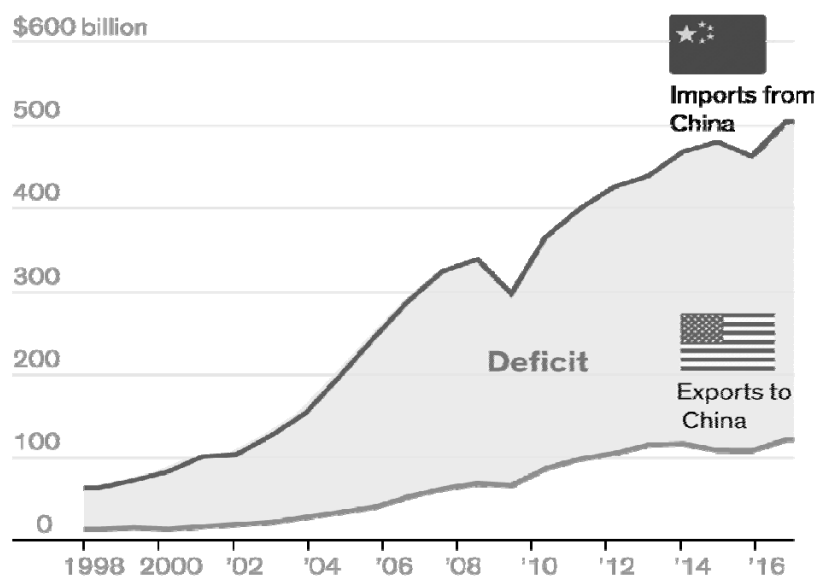
<sup>13</sup> *Palki Sharma*, <http://www.atimes.com/article/asian-nato-counter-chinas-rise/>, 12.09.2018

<sup>14</sup> *Keck Z.*, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/04/is-an-asian-nato-possible/>, 15.09.2018

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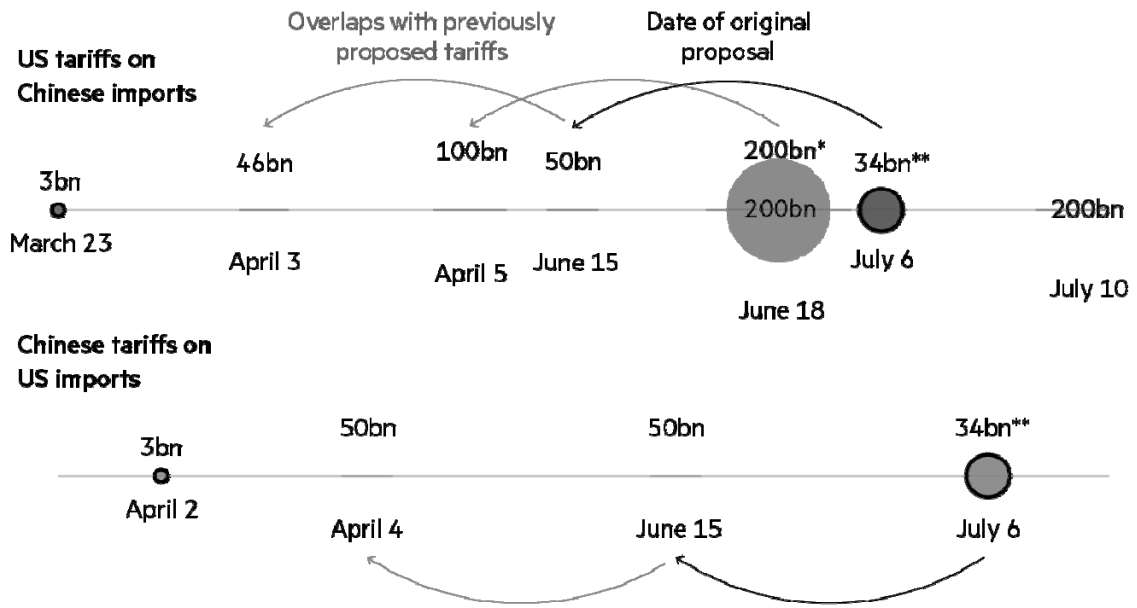
The widening trade gap



Data: United States International Trade Commission

# The US-China trade war so far

Each circle represents the total trade affected by announced tariffs, \$ ○ Imposed ○ Proposed



\*Additional threat to impose tariffs on a further \$200bn worth of goods  
 \*\*\$34bn plus \$16bn in imports to be targeted in coming weeks FT Graphic: Cale Tilford  
 Source: US International Trade Commission, Peterson Institute for International Economics, FT research  
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